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# **WITNESSING TO CHRIST IN INDIA**

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**Edited by**

**Jacob Parappally**

# JEEVADHARA

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# *jeevadhara*

A JOURNAL FOR SOCIO-RELIGIOUS RESEARCH

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## **Witnessing to Christ in India**

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## Editorial

The theme of this issue of *Jeevadhara, Witnessing to Christ in India*, was chosen after much deliberation. During a discussion with my colleagues on this theme some held the view that *witnessing* is a better way of expressing the method of communicating the Person and message of Jesus Christ to the people of our country than *proclamation*. Others were of the opinion that it is better to continue to use the word *proclamation* as it is biblical and the early Church was indeed proclaiming Jesus Christ. After all, it is the basic Christian claim that Jesus is the Lord and his message of liberation is of universal value. Without any interest in playing with words, it must be admitted that every witnessing is a proclamation but every proclamation need not necessarily be true witnessing. An authentic witnessing to Jesus Christ is unthreatening yet challenging, graciously inviting without intruding into the religious space of another.

All the articles in this issue discuss how one can effectively witness to Jesus Christ and his message in the context of India. What is relevant to the Indian context is also to a great extent valid for Asia because of its plurality of religions, cultures and socio-economic and political situations. The Christian claim that Jesus Christ is the answer to the quest for the meaning of life and the search for the integral liberation of human beings must be communicated in a language meaningful to the hearers of various contexts. This demands that we have to give up some of our traditional ways of proclaiming him. Joseph Mattam in his article, argues that we have to go beyond our customary theological language of proclamation and develop a new theological language emerging from the needs of the context without any interference from those who have no experience of the context. The plurality of religions with their claim to offer ways of salvation appears to be a serious challenge to the Christian claim of salvation only through Jesus Christ. Jacob Kavunkal outlines a Christology of Complimentarity which recognizes the value of other religions in the economy of salvation and shows that dialogue with them enhances our understanding of the Mystery of Christ, the Logos. A. Maria Arul Raja discusses in his article,

how a meaningful witnessing of Christ in the context of the victimization of Dalits by dominant castes can bring about the liberation of Dalits. Jesus' response to his life situations resonates very well with the deep relationship that Dalits have with their surroundings, their struggle with the complexities of daily life. John B Mundu in his article, argues that a meaningful interpretation of Jesus Christ from the Adivasi perspective demands that we go beyond the early titles given to Jesus Christ from other contexts. Bandhu Ishanand Vempeny underlines the importance of entering into dialogue with the secular society of India in order to communicate effectively the message of Jesus Christ. The central message of Jesus, namely, the Kingdom of God is similar to the World Family ideal rooted in the ethos, in the sacred traditions of the various religions of India and in the Indian Constitution.

Raimon Panikkar's insight into the Mystery of Christ challenges us to go beyond the static confines of the traditional Christology which according to him does not communicate the transforming vision of the entire reality, God, humans and the world, revealed through Jesus Christ. In the Indian/Asian context of religious and cultural pluralism Panikkar's inter-religious and cross-cultural approach to the Mystery of Christ finds articulation in his *Christophany*. It is imperative that a disciple should have a transforming vision of Christ in order to witness to him effectively. Breaking the boundaries of traditional Christology which can lead to aggressive proclamation, Christophany opens the way to experience and to 'comprehend...the breadth and length and height and depth' of the Mystery of Christ deeply and to witness to Christ meaningfully in the Indian context.

Witnessing to Jesus Christ, we must. But as Peter exhorts us, it must be 'giving an account for the hope that is in us with gentleness and reverence' (Cfr. I Pet 3:13b). One who is gripped by the transforming vision of Christ will find creative and effective ways of communicating that experience meaningfully in a particular context that others may be led to experience the same vision and be transformed. It is obvious that different contexts call for different ways of witnessing. Absolutizing and universalizing one or the other method of witnessing would do a great disservice to the cause of the Gospel. Jesus Christ is one but the ways of witnessing to him are many. The Church in India needs to continue with creative fidelity to the living tradition of the Church and with serious *response-ability* to the plurality of contexts, to communicate the person and message of Jesus Christ for the unfolding of humans and for the transformation of our society and the world.

# **Witnessing to Jesus Christ Through a Relevant Theological Language: An Indian Approach to a New Language in Theology**

**Joseph Mattam**

Witnessing to Jesus Christ in the Indian/Asian context demands from the Local churches that they recognize their serious responsibility to inculcate the Gospel message by using a language meaningful to the people. It calls for a concerted effort of all believers to liberate themselves from the illusory satisfaction of repeating the doctrines which do not challenge and transform people, religious practices that do not inspire and the proclamation that is not understood. To communicate Jesus and his message meaningfully, we need a new language of inculcation taking into account the various aspects of the present day Indian/Asian reality.

There are many reasons why looking for a new language in theology in the Indian/Asian context is an urgent necessity for the Church. The Church as a living organism needs constantly to revive and refresh itself. While the past and its contributions are very vital for the Church, they can become fetters if she does not constantly rethink her theological language, the mission command, etc. There are many areas that need attention. First of all, we must look into the Bible as it has its own historical, theological and social conditioning. Secondly, theological and doctrinal developments down the centuries also need attention, as they were formulated mostly in response to some challenges, in the form of a heresy, wrong teaching or practice that the Church encountered at one time or place. While those too were necessary, they may not be meaningful in another context and place. And thirdly, the present day context in which we find ourselves also demands that we re-think our message. Today we call it inculturation.

## I. Looking into the Bible

*Ecclesia in Asia* rightly emphasises fidelity to biblical literature. But it has many difficulties. The OT is the faith history of a particular people, their way of seeing everything: events, things, people and God. The Jews claimed to be a chosen people (just as the Muslims and others claim). They claimed that they were promised a land, which actually belonged to some one else and was taken by the Jews through sheer force and craftiness. The Bible does not look at life from the point of view of those whose land was taken away by the Jews and were made land-less<sup>1</sup>. Not only in the OT but even in the NT patriarchy is at work. Martha's confession in Jn 11.27 is not different from that of Peter in Matthew (16.16), yet her confession is relegated to the background. Peter's gains him the right to be the rock. The condition laid down by the Apostles themselves is that only those who have seen the risen Lord can be considered an apostle; Mary Magdalene is the first one to see the risen Lord, yet she is not considered an apostle. Even Paul is guilty of selective reading of the OT. For instance, in 1 Cor 11.7b-8, 1 Tim 2.13-14, Genesis chapter two is used instead of one. There are other problems with regard to the Bible, as we shall see later. There are many themes in the Bible, which call for a revaluation. But I want to focus only on just two areas: the revelation of God the Father as given by Jesus and the New Testament, especially the Synoptics, though not exclusively, and its contribution to a rethinking of the Paschal Mystery (and subsequent theology), and secondly, the way of speaking about Jesus in a language meaningful to those who are open to his message.

This has to be situated in the context of the OT. The outlook, the spirituality of the OT is very different from that of Jesus and of the NT. The OT has obviously many images of God. God is presented as compassionate, merciful, faithful, forgiving, a caring creator and redeemer. The Prophets especially depict a God who wants justice and faith rather than sacrifices. Yet the most prominent image of God in the OT seems to be that of a liberator who has made a covenant with the people whom he keeps faithful to it through the giving and observance

1 Recently I saw the evil effects of this type of thinking. In a *Jesuit Symposium* at Jerusalem in 2000 on Jewish Christian relations, a prominent Jewish lady told us that in 1948 they had just taken back what was theirs from the beginning, what Yahweh God had promised them.

of the laws. Hence the most characteristic and prevalent image of God in the OT is that of God as law giver and also as a just judge who rewards or punishes people according to their behaviour (Deut 30.15f). Hence we have stories of God punishing people for their infidelity and rewarding them for their fidelity. This image is followed up in the NT when Jesus talks about eternal reward and eternal punishment, and often promising rewards, though this picture does not really go well with the picture of God we shall examine at some length eventually, and the spirituality that Jesus himself seems to propose - a spirituality of "bearing fruit" Jn 15:16). Because God is a just judge, people are expected to keep the laws and avoid sins. If people sin, they live in fear; if they are faithful, they tend to become self-righteous, as we see in the elder brother in the story of the father of two sons (Lk 15:29). The Psalms too witness to this fear: God is just and does not go by appearance, but by the deeds of the person. Rules of purity-impurity, the priesthood, sacrifices and rituals are very important in this system. In this context the book of Hebrews makes sense that Jesus makes the *once for all* sacrifice which brings forgiveness to people and opens the sanctuary of God, though the same letter makes it clear that the OT sacrifices did not really obtain forgiveness, but only reminded God of our sins. Some of the NT interpretations of the Christ event too follow this background. My contention in this paper is that the image of God that Jesus gives, both by his words and by his life, as we find in the NT books, is not followed in the interpretation of the Christ event. Secondly the understanding of Jesus and the way of speaking about him also need our attention.

### **1. The Merciful, Forgiving, Unconditionally Loving Father**

In order to defend his behaviour Jesus resorts to the parables of the lost coin, sheep and son (Luke 15). Jesus' behaviour, which the Pharisees and others oppose, is that he ate with sinners, tax collectors, women, prostitutes, Samaritans and other sinners and outcasts. He mingled with women and had women followers. Besides the parables in Luke 15, there are many stories in the NT which reveal the person of Jesus and thus the person of the Father: Jesus' attitude to the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11), the woman who washes his feet with her tears (Lk 7:36-50), the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Lk 18:9-14), the story of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10), the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:4-26) and many others. John tells us often that Jesus is revealing the Father, his actions are of the Father, he teaches only what he has heard

from or was taught by his Father – hence Jesus' attitude to sinners and the rejected of society is to be taken seriously to understand the reality of God, the Father (Jn 1:14, 18; 5:19; 8:29; 12:50; 14:9).

In Luke 15.32f, the father does not condone the actions of the sons – both are sinners and in need of repentance and of being forgiven, not just the younger one, as often the story is interpreted. Given the OT background one is certainly surprised to see the attitude of the father to the younger one, and the elder brother is not exaggerating when he says that he deserves to be rewarded and the other to be punished. The picture of God we get here is something *new*. Here the OT picture of God is, so to say, kept aside in favour of another image: God loves unconditionally and is not controlled by our behaviour. God's goodness is not a response to our goodness. What Jesus says in Matt 5.43ff is verified here. His goodness is shown not to someone who had been faithful to him, but to the one, who had rejected his love, had gone away from him. We also notice in this chapter of Luke that while the woman and the shepherd go in search of the lost coin and sheep, the father does not search for the son. In the OT God takes the initiative in seeking out the hiding Adam (Gen 3:9), whereas in Luke's parable He allows the son to experience misery and to find his way back, though ultimately it is the memory of the goodness of the father that brings the wayward son back to the father's home and love.

Jesus does not condone the action of sinners, but demands that they repent. Not only in the inaugural mission manifesto but also all through his life he demanded repentance from his listeners. They had to change, they had to believe in the good news and become new (Mk 1:14) – the change was not to be in God. He did not say that because they repented God loves them, but because God loves them, they could repent. Belief in the good news of God's love becomes the source of repentance, a source of new life.

Matthew (20:1-16) gives the same message through another story. God is not conditioned in his goodness by our *deeds*, but responds to our *needs*. The landowner offers every worker sufficient for the day, even though some did not have the luck of working the whole day. Those who object to his generosity are behaving exactly according to what the OT would have expected of them. They are not bad people at all. We must add, though, that the idea of God's justice is often misunderstood in opposition to his love; whereas his love is his justice,

his justice is his love. His love/justice meets the needs of the needy: the sinner needs forgiveness and a chance to start afresh, the sick needs healing, the broken needs to be put together, the hopeless needs to be given hope, a chance to live for something greater. That is what Jesus does with the Samaritan woman, Zacchaeus, the tax collector Matthew, the fishermen like Peter, Zealots like John, and the woman caught in adultery.<sup>2</sup> In 2 Tim 2.13 the same truth is affirmed. Paul says, “If we are faithless, He [God] remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself”. This is another way of affirming his unconditional and unchanging love/fidelity in spite of our infidelity.

Before we conclude this section, we may add one more picture of God that we gather from Jesus’ attitude to Peter. Though Peter, in spite of Jesus’ warnings, denied Jesus in public (which today we might call an apostasy!), Jesus makes no reference to it at all. Instead, he just asks Peter if he loves him. Nothing of the past is kept in mind – he looks merely at the present and the future, by giving him a responsibility in the community.

If God loves the sinner, what is the meaning of his forgiveness? The Bible talks of forgiveness a great deal. Often Jesus offers forgiveness. But what is forgiveness? The damage done to another person has to be compensated; even God cannot excuse anyone from that obligation. By sin we harm ourselves and we deprive ourselves of that life giving love of God, we break our relation with God. God is not offended (he is too great for that!), but he suffers (is compassionate) with his foolish children who do harm to themselves in their foolishness, and continues to love the sinner. The dictionary meaning of the word forgiveness cannot be applied to God, because he continues to love us even when we have sinned and turned away from him. Hence forgiveness is the name we give to the unconditional love of God, the love that remains constant, in spite of our sins and failures. God offers the sinner a chance to start afresh; opens a door for the sinner to get out of his/her own imprisonment. When we ask for forgiveness we are consciously opening ourselves to God’s ever continuing unconditional love and are agreeing to begin again. God is not “doing” anything new there – the newness is in us as we begin afresh. If this picture of God is taken seriously much of our theology and spirituality would change.

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2 God’s justice for the baby is its mother, for the birds their wings, instincts, and grains in the fields are the justice of God for them.

## 2. The Paschal Mystery Revisited

My contention is that we need to look at the whole Paschal mystery in the light of the picture of God as delineated above. If God loves the sinner, if God's forgiveness (unchanging love) is total and gratuitous, then we have to explain the death of Jesus not in terms of a sacrifice offered to God. The kind of thinking culminating in Anselm has to be seen as a true aberration. Let us not forget that Jesus in his inaugural mission manifesto does not say that he has come to die for the sins of people, or to make a sacrifice of himself to God.

We must emphasize the fact that Jesus was *murdered*. This is often overlooked because we are accustomed to saying that "He died for our sins", forgetting that we are giving an interpretation to his being brutally hanged on a cross which was a scandal to the Jews and to everyone. For a pious Jew, it was inconceivable that a godly man could be crucified. Hence they had to interpret his murder in salvific terms. In the Letter to the Hebrews, which then interpreted the Christ-event in OT terms, the sacrificial aspect was taken for granted. Some of the expressions based on the OT that Paul used also began to be interpreted in sacrificial terms: expiation, redemption, etc.

In the light of the picture of God that we have seen above, we have to affirm clearly that God loves us and we are his children and friends not because Jesus died for us, but it is because God loves us sinners (who are therefore without life) that He sent his Son: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (Jn 3:16), and that he may show us the way back to the Father. Paul himself has very clear statements about the Father as the source of salvation. "Through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things..." (Col 1:20). "All this is from God [the Father] who reconciled us to himself through Christ...that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself..." (2 Cor 5:18-19). With this emphasis on the action of the Father and his unconditional love, how do we interpret the Christ event?

We are familiar with Paul's Adam Christology, where he contrasts the two Adams: the one who disobeyed and brought sin and death and the other by his obedience brought an end to sin and brought life (cfr Rom 5:12f; see also: Rom 8:3, Gal 4:4, Phil 2:6-11, 2 Cor 8:9). What is obvious is that Jesus lives his life the way the Father wanted humankind

to do so from the very beginning: in loving obedience. His murder is the direct consequence of his life. His loving obedience meant that he would see reality through the eyes of the Father as he opposed sin, injustice, everything that dehumanized humans in any form and supported life in every way. His concerns were not the laws and their observance but the wholeness and freedom of humans. Hence he healed them on the Sabbaths; he opposed the legalism, ritualism and the heartlessness of the Pharisees and the rich. Above all, the image of God that Jesus presented to the people was a threat to the established religious patterns and practices. If God is a friend of sinners and welcomes them unconditionally, if he puts proper brotherly/sisterly relation above any religious act, if meeting the needs of the needy gained us salvation (Lk 15:1-32; 10:25-37; 17:11-19; 21:1-4; Matt 5:23; 25:31f) then the experts of the law, the exact observance of the law, the sacrificial system – all these lost their primary importance in God's scheme of things. Hence those who lived by these were under attack and to them Jesus was a threat. The remark of Caiaphas (Jn 11:50), which John interprets theologically, is a historical consequence of the life of Jesus. If Jesus were allowed to continue, the popular uprising that was sure to follow would endanger the Temple and the whole system of 'peaceful' existence. Hence the killing of Jesus was a necessity to save their religion. It is also important to remark that the Romans killed Jesus. Only they could crucify someone: Stoning was the punishment for blasphemy, of which Jesus was accused. Jesus was not stoned to death, but crucified which was meant for political rebels – so also the inscription on the cross.

In summary, Jesus lived a life that was pleasing to the Father; he never allowed sin to have power over him, even on the cross he loved all, including his enemies. In that sense, he overcame sin. He lived the kind of life that God wanted. In him humanity realized its responsibility, its love-ability and so having made the proper response to God's love, has "returned" to the Father. In him God's love became truly operative. In Jesus the Father's plan for humankind came to fulfillment and completion. In Jesus, humanity reached its destiny: loving obedience to God and loving relation to the whole of creation. Jesus acknowledges constantly that he is from the Father, he does only what the Father wants of him, and at the same time, he gives life, freedom, wholeness, a new future and hope. Jesus shows the way how every child of God can live: in the face of hatred, opposition, evil done to us, we love and

we forgive, as the Father does with all his children (Matt 5:43f), and we give life and bring wholeness. Jesus' life and death shows that human self-fulfillment is not in dominating, in having power over others, in possessing wealth and high positions, but in self gift, in being for others in service. In and through Jesus God reveals to us what God is ("God is love") and what we are to be and to do, "love as I have loved you". Jesus shows a new possibility in this world of sin: in spite of hatred and violence, one can live in love. Hence John's description of Jesus as the Way, the Truth and the Life is very important. He has shown the way to the Father: no one can go to the Father except through him – this is the way the Father wants.

Jesus' own way of speaking about salvation is also very enlightening. In Luke 19 he speaks of Zacchaeus as saved when he changed his pattern of relationship: he became just and caring, ready to share his wealth with the needy. The same idea is given in Matt 25:31ff: where and how do we meet God and respond to God. Those who cared for the needy, those who loved, are saved. In both cases nothing is said about forgiveness of sins. Jesus mentions no other condition. Salvation for Jesus was not a matter of any change brought about in God, but a change in human relationship and our readiness to respond to the needs of the needy. Jesus attaches the "do likewise" only to the Good Samaritan story and to the foot washing. I am not playing down the importance of Jesus' death. Jesus tells us that the greatest love is in dying for one's friends. The personal sacrifice of Jesus, agreeing to be killed (not a cultic sacrifice, which placates God and is offered to God), is thanks to his love for his Father and for us human beings: the ultimate manifestation of the God of love.

When the NT insists that "it was the will of the Father that Jesus dies", we need to understand it in its historical context. As I said above, for the Jews Jesus' crucifixion was not intelligible. They interpreted every event in history as planned and willed by God, for nothing could happen apart from God's plan and will – whether it be the falling of the rains or the rising of the sun. What the Father directly wanted was that the Son lives in loving obedience. That life of loving obedience meant opposing the forces that dehumanize and enslave human lives for which Jesus was killed. His being killed was the consequence of the type of life the Father wanted. His innocent Son brutally murdered does not please the Father but the fact that in spite of suffering and death, he

remained obedient and loved to the end. This central fact of our religion needs to be re-interpreted.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. A Way of Looking at the Person of Jesus

In speaking about Jesus even the NT has limitations. I am not referring to any of the “criticisms” but to other aspects. The people of the NT express the mystery of Jesus with the background of the OT and its hopes. They see him as the fulfilment of the promises Yahweh made to the Jews, the fulfilment of both the expectations of the Torah and the hopes of the prophets – as the Messiah or the Christ, and themselves as the new Israel. Paul goes beyond this, but primarily it is this designation which gains ascendancy in the early Church. Do we need to be bound by that today? Translations, however well done, will not suffice. But in India/Asia we need to go beyond the early *formulations* about Jesus and find new ways of speaking about the mystery of that person in whom the face of the Mystery was revealed in his compassion, mercy and table fellowship: in actions that witness to the Father’s love. People easily recognise that God was at work in Jesus. But the title *Christ* is conditioned by the Jewish expectations; the reality of Jesus, his compassion, his universal outlook, his way of seeing all as children of God, his emphasis on love, on the Rule of God - these are perennial and are beyond religions, cultural and linguistic limitations.

There is another aspect to the problem: the Jews are still waiting for the Messiah. Some would consider the present State of Israel as the fulfilment of the promise; some are still waiting. The very fact that there is no true identity between the awaited one and the one, who came, should make us want to go beyond. A true Son of God in the metaphysical sense ('of the same substance as the Father') was not what the Jews were waiting for; they were looking for a political liberator who would ensure that they would gain the land promised to them. The promise made by the angel to Mary (Lk 1:32b-33) is not yet fulfilled. Hence are we justified in limiting Jesus to the expected Messiah and forget that he is radically more, and that any existing title is insufficient to express that mystery? Therefore, I am of the opinion that an inculcated Christology does not begin with any dogmatic formulation

<sup>3</sup> If we insist that it was the Father’s will that Jesus be crucified, then we are admitting that the Father wanted a heinous crime to be committed, and that he would be pleased with a crime – this does not make sense.

about Jesus. We have to start with the man Jesus we find in the Gospels, who, thanks to his Abba experience, was remarkable for his freedom, love and option for the poor. These he manifested in various ways: table fellowship, mingling with all types of people, compassion for the suffering, his going beyond the barriers erected by religion, gender, culture and society (see Jn 11:52; Eph 2:11f)). This Jesus cannot be circumscribed by a known title; any known title is just incapable of bearing the burden of this Mystery; a title from the OT cannot adequately describe this Jesus.

## II. Fidelity to the Past and Openness to the Present<sup>4</sup>

Christian faith encompasses community without denying its personal dimension, yet the emphasis on fidelity to the past can be a hindrance to true inculturation. We ought to recognise that the doctrinal statements made in the past were responses to the problems, heresies and situations of a particular people in a specific place and time, conditioned by a philosophical and often political background. For example, most of the early fathers had Platonic and neo-Platonic backgrounds. St. Thomas and others had Aristotelian background. The teaching of various councils too were conditioned by their context: for example, the teaching of the councils of Nicea, Ephesus, Constantinople, Chalcedon - all these are conditioned by specific problems. The expressions used about Jesus in the Nicene creed were necessary because of the denials of Arius. But they have caused serious damage to the understanding of the mystery of Jesus - his humanity was played down, following him was replaced by worship of him, etc. If we just repeat these formulae without understanding the context, we shall not only not reach the Mystery, but we shall fail to grasp the significance of the Mystery for our times. Besides, those doctrines use conceptualist and essentialist language, forgetting that the Mystery can be expressed only in symbolic language and not in essentialist categories.

There is another reason for not absolutizing the teaching of the Fathers and of the Councils. Most of the Fathers and the Councils did not seem to share the background of Jesus: his concerns, preferences, priorities,

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4 Mattam, J., "An Inculturated Servant Church" in *Bend Without Fear: Hopes and Possibilities for an Indian Church: Essays in Honour of Prof. Kurien Kunnumparam S.J.*, Edited by K. Pandikattu and R. Rocha, Jnana-Deepa Vidyapeeth/ISPCK, Pune/Delhi 2003, pp.203-224.

choices, his options and his idea of God. Hence today they are not of much value in understanding Jesus.

A word on respecting the *sensus fidelium*. This is very much conditioned by the input given to a particular people. The *sensus fidelium* thus becomes very suspect as a guide for inculturation as no person is simply out of his/her context. If people have been taught, for example, that Jesus' whole message was about life after death and about saving one's soul, their conditioning is such that they see everything from that perspective. Take the example of the *dalits* (the so called 'untouchables') in India. At one time they were instructed to hate anything that was related to Hinduism. Besides, Hindus had for centuries oppressed them. Now when the Church, in the name of inculturation, takes elements from Hinduism under which they had at one time suffered and consciously rejected, their *sensus fidei* tells them that what the Church does is wrong. The "deposit of faith" is not primarily the doctrines we have inherited, but the basic truth of God's love revealed in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. This has to be preserved and handed down. From around the 4th century, the Church emphasised the importance of dogmas and it has proposed many dogmas, with which we are overloaded. Fidelity to the past does not mean just repetition, translations of the past, but truly new formulation of the Mystery of Jesus in the present day context and culture. We proclaim the Jesus we find in the NT and let people respond to his person and message in their own way. Beginning with the concerns, priorities and outlook of Jesus, we respond to our concrete situation, just the same way as the fathers of the early Councils did in their context. That means being bold to look into the past and keep aside things that we have accumulated, but which in fact do not help us understand the Mystery better and become better disciples of Jesus.

Some dogmas and doctrines which might have been meaningful in one context of their formulation may not be relevant in another context. A truly inculturated Church does not absolutize the dogmas of the past but re-interprets the Mystery for our time and place.

Without such a readiness the Church cannot become truly inculturated. We need to go back to the basic teachings of the New Testament, as the early Church did for nearly four centuries before various dogmas were formulated. For three or four centuries the early Christians who lived the Mystery and were affected by it in their lives,

were ready to lay down their lives for it, without very accurate formulations. We too should get along with the business of living the Gospel, without attempting to conceptualise it.

The apophatic tradition of the Church needs be revived. Since many of the dogmas and teachings do not arise out of the concerns of Jesus, I suggest that they are of little value to us today in understanding Jesus. We need to start where Jesus started: His Abba experience which led him to a form of life in freedom, love and option for the poor. Thanks to this he was able to take a stand against the outlook of the world where greed, lust, hatred, fear, attachment and ambition ruled one's life. His outlook and that of the world are diametrically opposed to each other. The councils of the early Church and their teachings did not start from the premises of Jesus. By repeating that Jesus is the same substance as the Father, have we really got into the mind and heart of Jesus, without which the following of him would be impossible? We ought to keep in mind that "not calling me Lord, Lord, but doing the will of my Father" is what he wants. And doing the will of the Father, meant for Jesus, seeing reality through the eyes of the Father. This was not the case in the time of the early Councils and in the Church dogmas. Roman centralisation has not helped inculturation. It has prevented our bishops from taking responsibility for the local churches. To say that a translation of the missal into Gujarati, which is approved by the bishops of the place, has to get the approval of people in Rome who have no knowledge of that language is absurd. This is centralisation is at its worst. Sometimes one has to say 'enough is enough' – leave us alone to decide how we pray to our God in ways that are suited to our culture and way of life.

The local bishops will have to take much more seriously their responsibility as heads of the local churches, and not function as the functionaries of Rome or of the Roman Dicasteries. The fact that such a pattern was followed all these years, is no justification to demand that it has to be continued.

### **III. Inculturation and a New Language<sup>5</sup>**

Inculturation is a matter of fidelity to the truth of the incarnation of God's Word in history. It presupposes an understanding of culture and

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5 Mattam, J. (2002): "Inculturated Evangelisation and Conversion", *Exchange* 31/4, pp.306-322.

inculturation and the problems with it, but due to lack of space I shall not enter into these, but merely focus on 1. problems in inculturation; 2. the necessary conditions for it; and 3. Jesus' way of inculturation and its demands on us today.

### **1. Problems in Inculturation**

Culture and religion are systems of meaning-making. They are separate but interpenetrate each other and are intrinsically inter-related. But the problem today is that faith has become so en-fleshed in a specific culture for so many centuries that it is difficult to say what is culture and what is faith. In the past, missionaries assumed that religion and culture were separable. They spoke of instrumentalizing culture to spread the Gospel message. But culture is not just a means through which the Christian Church could be incarnated in any given place. Today most would agree that these two cannot be adequately distinguished, since the faith comes naturally in a cultural garb. Even central and universally valid doctrines are formulated in the philosophical categories of a particular time and people. A cursory glance at the history of the dogmas will reveal how much they are coloured by the prevalent culture of the group that formulated them. Hence inculturation is not easy.

Another danger in inculturation is the elevation of one culture or worldview (European) as the norm for the whole world or the whole Church (colonial period). The historical embodiment of Christianity in particular cultures serves as a serious obstacle for further inculturation. For example, for nearly sixteen centuries, from the late Roman times until our own, a mono-cultural view of the world held sway among the Churches. The Western Churches assumed that they had the best culture and the Gospel must be proclaimed to every nation in Western cultural forms. During the colonial period, Christianity became colonial and evangelization a form of spiritual aggression. Since the Council of Trent and the Roman centralisation, missionary work of the various churches functioned like an export firm, exporting to the whole world a European religion along with other elements of this supposedly superior culture without attempting to change the commodity. Even today, Christianity and the Christian-West are closely linked; they are predominant in all the international systems and organisations and their history is full of wars and bloodshed. This fact creates an ambiguity and suspicion among the Indians/Asians who otherwise are deeply attracted to Christ and his message.

One has to be aware of another difficulty too. In the name of inculturation we may impose one of the specific cultures of a country or of a group as the norm for everyone. For example, in most of the efforts in India at liturgical inculturation, the Sanskritic tradition and symbols were taken and presented as the one Indian culture. The cultures of the tribals, the *dalits* and of the marginalized in general were left out. In one country itself there are diversities of cultures. In India for example, there are some 4636 communities with their own cultures.

Another serious difficulty is that when we want to get into the “little tradition”, it is going to be a long process. It is hard to get an insider’s view; anthropologists say that at first people do not open up; they speak only what they think others like to hear, not what they really think and feel, for which a long period of staying among the people is required.

One major problem in any attempt to inculcuate the Gospel message, especially among Catholics, is the lack of authority of the local Church to do anything effectively. If every one of its actions is to be judged by those bureaucrats in the Vatican who are incompetent to do it as they have no experience of the local cultures, how is it ever going to happen that the local churches can truly inculcuate? Linked to this is another element to be taken seriously. As we have seen earlier, all the formulated doctrines have been responses to particular “heresies”, problems of a particular place and time. These formulations do not have a perennial value; they are changeable, they need to be reformulated and often, they could be kept aside as they may not be relevant to our time and place. Our problems are different and the Gospel has to respond to our situation afresh. Transporting existing systems and doctrines will not be useful and relevant to a new situation.

Hence the following conditions seem necessary to witness to Jesus and his message more effectively:

- *Decentralisation and de-clericalisation of the Church.* The local Churches ought to have authority to decide the changes they think proper, without an outside authority deciding for them. All will have to contribute to this process, not merely the clergy.
- *Relativisation* (desist the temptation of absolutizing) of the past: the past while necessary, can strangulate a growing and living organism.
- *Emphasis on orthopraxis* as against orthodoxy, as in the past.
- *Recognition of the diversity of cultures even in one country:* one

dominating culture should not be made the norm for all, as was done in the past. There is no one specially privileged culture or language for the communication of the Gospel.

## 2. Jesus' Way of Inculturation

In a given locality in which culture we inculturate the Gospel: the culture of the elite minority or of the struggling, oppressed and suffering masses? The answer can come only from our vision and understanding of Jesus and his options, his way of "inculturation"<sup>6</sup>. Though Jesus was born a Jew, he did not accept the outlook, the value system, in that sense the 'culture' of his time; he lived a counter-cultural life. In his time a person was equated with his/her possessions, position in society, actions, the group s/he belonged to and external appearances. This system necessarily lead to competition, with its accompanying attitudes of pride, jealousy, opposition, discrimination, hatred, and fear – a non-loving life. Even today this is the outlook that governs the life of almost everyone. Jesus did not accept this outlook. His table fellowship was an explicit rejection of this 'culture'.

Thanks to his Abba-experience, though he lived in a stratified society, Jesus made an option for the poor (Matt 4:23-24, 9:35-36, Lk 4:16f). He identified himself with the lowly and the poor and made their culture his own (Matt 25: 31-46). That is how the Word became incarnated, inculturated. Jesus' baptism can be seen as his insertion into the culture and life of the poor, or as John says, became "flesh" - someone socially powerless and insignificant. Paul says the same thing in the *kenosis* idea (Phil 2.6f). Like his life, his death was a *dalit*<sup>7</sup> death - condemned and executed as a criminal, outside the gate. And the letter to the Hebrews calls the Church to leave the elite and the city and to go outside the gate, where the *chamars*, *pulayas* (out castes) and other victims live (Heb 13:11-13). Jesus chose his close friends from the working class, fisher folk and from among women. His mission field was primarily the poor villages of Galilee. He spoke to them in stories, imageries which the ordinary could understand. Jesus opted for a culture of caring for one

6 Rayan, S., "Inculturation and Peoples' Struggles": *Indian Missiological Review*, (IMR) (March, 1997):40-41.

7 *Dalits* normally live on the outskirts of the village, separated from the upper caste people. Rayan is referring to this fact, when he talks of Jesus' death as a *dalit* death.

another and sharing what one has. That is the point of the Cana event (Jn 2:1-11), and of the multiplication stories<sup>8</sup>. Jesus rejected the dominant oppressive culture. In stories and parables he showed the rich the foolishness of accumulating possessions meant for the needs of all (Lk 12:13-31, 6:24-26). Jesus so often spoke of the incompatibility of mammon and the kingdom (Mk 10:23-27; Matt 6:19-21, 24-33). The parable of the Good Samaritan contrasts the elite culture of the priests, spiritual elite, with the culture of the despised Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37); the same contrast is in Luke 16:19-31 and 17:11-19. In the Sabbath violations by Jesus we also have the same contrast (John 5:1-21; 9:1-41; Matt 12:1-8; Mk 2:13-17; 23-28; Mk 3:1-6). Jesus heals a bent down, crippled woman (Lk 13:10-17); the woman represents all the poor and downtrodden, bent down under rulers and temple traditions. Jesus is for the woman and the ordinary poor people. He stands for life and its rights<sup>9</sup>.

### **3. Inculturation Today**

Inculturation is not primarily a matter of using in the liturgy some elements borrowed from the high Brahmanical culture (speaking for India), but interpreting the message anew according to the culture of the people of the place. What is important is not doctrinal transplantation but an authentic life, based on a faith-response to the Gospel. The Spirit opens Christian faith more and more to the wide world of Asia, Africa and of the new emerging cultures and counter-cultures. It gives the Church the chance to listen more attentively to the many voices so far unheeded, whether it be the voices of the awesome richness and variety of cultures in the world, or the voices of the poor denouncing the ambiguous features of dominating cultures.<sup>10</sup>

The Indian/Asian reality is characterised by religions and religious pluralism, the poor, various forms of struggles, modernisation, social changes and secularisation, which threaten traditional values. In this context a meaningful witnessing to Jesus through inculturation means to critically analyse these situations and take a prophetic stand against the modernising and globalising trends that are affecting India/Asia deeply. Inculturation also calls for awareness of different cultures in India - tribal, *dalit*, folk cultures, and the Sanskritic cultures of the elite classes. In India, for example, out of over 1000 million people, nearly half live

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8 Ibid., 41-45,

9. Ibid., 44,

10. Ibid.

below the poverty line; more than half are illiterate; women and children are exploited; untouchability is practised in various subtle ways. Our efforts at inculturation must be oriented towards the incarnation of the Church in the life and sufferings of the excluded, regardless of religious affiliations, in their struggles for dignity and rights. Following Jesus' option, we too must opt to be with the poor. That would mean a new life style for us and a critique of peoples' greed, our greed and our consumerism. Given massive poverty in India, it is necessary that our life style becomes simpler and closer to the poorer classes, managing with just what we need. The prophetic role of the members of the religious Congregations would also mean that they become counter-cultural groups.

The Church has to become a Church *of* the poor, not just a Church *for* the poor. At a deeper level it would mean supporting their cause and standing with them in their struggles against discrimination and atrocities, and for equal opportunities and rights. There are various struggles going on. We must be immersed into the struggles, hopes and aspirations of the people. A faith commitment born of this will lead to a spirituality of involvement, of praxis or action-reflection-action process, of solidarity with and liberation of the poor and the oppressed. Involvement in the struggles of the people has to become the source of theology and liturgy. With that, authentic local liturgies and rites would shape up and come to birth from within the struggles themselves, as did the celebration in Exodus 16 from the preceding liberation travail, and the Eucharist from the Passion of Jesus. We have a long way to go to make liturgy expressive of the struggles and aspirations of the local people. If we do not hear God calling us in the life struggles of the people, then we do not really hear God's Word (See Matt 25.31f). If we are not sensitive to the glaring inequalities and injustices within the parish community or in society at large, how can we partake of the one bread and cup in the Eucharist?<sup>11</sup>

All cultures contain the seeds of the Word<sup>12</sup>. No culture is foreign to Christ. God's self-manifestation excludes none. In God's plan of salvation, all humans have the same destiny (1 Tim 2:3-4) - the realization of the Rule of God. This implies that we accept each culture as the result of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit among his people,

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11 Ibid., 35-45

12 *Ad Gentes* 11, *Lumen Gentium* 17

without denying the element of sin that is also present. Since all cultures have God's message, clothed always in cultural forms, the process of inculcation is possible through culture exchanges, or inter-culturation or mutual fecundation. It is a symbiosis of two religious traditions allowing free play, which results in the inner enrichment of both. This process involves transformation of Christianity by the 'seed of the Word' found in other religions as well as the transformation of cultures by the Christian Good News. Inculcation is a two-way process, a give and take.

Just as the NT was built on the OT background, in Asian and African countries, we need to build on the history of God's working in their life. These people have their own "Old Testament"; the story of God's working in their life and culture. This cannot be ignored, as has been done in the past for many centuries. Their stories, myths, folklore, art, songs, plays, skills, proverbs and metaphors, musical instruments, parables, all culled from their group experience, need to become the basis for the expression of the message and person of Jesus. Besides the above, we can think of language, structures of authority, community organisation, the contemplative element of the Sanskrit tradition, the awareness of God in nature, in everything and the strong community sense of the tribal cultures.

In the past the Church as a structure was carried to other places, not so much the faith. Faith is a new outlook moulded by Jesus' outlook; it is a concrete response to the mystery of Jesus as revealed in his life, death and resurrection. It cannot be imposed from outside. People can grasp, experience and respond to the Gospel only when it is obtainable in their own cultural and religious realities. When the Good News of Jesus is proclaimed to the people, in their own living realities, with the background of their own religious past, they will respond to it in their reflections, worship, celebrations and festivities. They will also use their own language, symbols and other expressions giving rise to a new local Church, new forms of liturgy and new theology.

It is our duty and right to live and express our faith in our own evolving cultures with authentic cultural features and titles, without being bound by imported and imposed patterns, structures (Syrian, Latin, etc.), and dogmas. We need to be critical of what we have received from tradition: words, concepts, practices, doctrines, etc. Words like

redemption, ransom come from a society that had slaves; words like transubstantiation, hypostatic union, etc., are from a particular philosophical and cultural background which we do not share, nor the problem of the Reformation and consequently the defensive theology of the Council of Trent. Church structures are an area that need much attention, as nothing has so far been done in that sphere. Something has been attempted in areas like theology, liturgy and art; though mostly through *brahmanical*, dominant caste cultural elements; whereas in the area of Church structures no change so far has been attempted.

### **Conclusion**

To witness to Jesus in a meaningful way through inculturation, the Church has to become a new model, a new concept of the Church as truly the people of God where all are response-able and important members, not just the clergy alone. In other words, inculturation must begin with life, not the liturgy and dogmas, though they are important aspects of life. A greater trust in the presence of the Spirit and the hidden action of the Spirit relativises the past and its contribution. God has not stopped ‘speaking’ to his people. What we need is not mere Church expansion, but the spread of the good news of God’s love incarnated in communities of love, sharing and justice, to which evangelisation is directed. The importance of the Church and Christians becoming truly gospel people, with a new outlook, ready to follow the Master in a radical manner is the need of the hour. Following in the footsteps of Jesus, the Church must become a Church of the poor, being born in their culture and committed to their cause, joining in their struggles for life and human dignity. Liturgies and theologies have to rise from such commitment – we do not need to protect and propagate the doctrines and practices of the past.

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# **Jesus Christ in the Context of Religious Pluralism: A Christology of Complementarity**

**Jacob Kavunkal**

Christian collaboration with other religions cannot be limited to certain activities such as Interreligious Dialogue, or some joint ventures for common good, but must also look into the very being of other religions as permeated by the Mystery that in Christian tradition we identify as Jesus Christ. A meaningful witnessing to Jesus Christ in the Indian/Asian context calls for a Christology of Complementarity recognizing the Mystery manifested in history in the Person of Jesus Christ present in all authentic religious traditions. This challenges the Church to widen its theological horizons to accept the divine plan of religious pluralism and its role in sustaining the followers of these religions in their pilgrimage to salvation, due to the presence of the Mystery of the Word in them.

In the context of religious pluralism as well as the intense reflections on the mission of the Church, Christology has come to occupy a pivotal role in theological writings. A Christian cannot compromise the Christian faith in the centrality of Jesus Christ in Christian living and witnessing. How this is to be understood and spelt out is the issue. This has to be done in the light of biblical evidence.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* Pope John Paul II has reminded the Church in Asia that its mission in Asia has to be carried out in the spirit of complementarity and harmony (n 6).

All of this indicates an innate spiritual insight and moral wisdom in the Asian soul, and it is the core around which a growing sense of “being Asian” is built. This “being Asian” is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony. In this framework of complementarity and harmony, the Church can communicate the gospel in a way that is faithful to her own

Tradition and to the Asian soul. This in turn offers us the possibility of evolving a relevant interpretation of the meaning of Jesus Christ from a complementary perspective in so far as mission is the sharing of the Christian experience of Jesus Christ.

In the following pages we shall see how we can develop a Christology of complementarity, which in turn will enable us to live and proclaim Jesus Christ in harmony with the followers of other religions, without watering down the Christian faith in the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Right at the outset it has to be emphasized that these reflections are made for the sake of greater discipleship and not for more information on Jesus Christ or as rationality for Christian belief.

It may also be pointed out that Christology has to be developed with a spirit to make it meaningful to the local context and to the audience, as did Jesus of Nazareth consistently in his ministry. So also the different addresses in the Acts of the Apostles (2: 17-36; 13: 16-41; 17: 22-31; etc.) as well as the Pauline letters show us how the New Testament supports Christian diversity in the understanding of Jesus Christ. As Jeffrey Vanderwilt has written, what the Jerusalem Council taught was accommodation, toleration and justification. But 'heresy' came in to defend authority with its 'anathema' to create a Church with borders.<sup>1</sup>

## **1. Harmony in the Indian/Asian World-view and the Bible**

Harmony is a foundational value in the Asian world-view represented by concepts like *yin-yang*, *tao*, *Rta*, etc. Etymologically, *Rta* in Sanskrit means course and thus it refers to cosmic order, the maintenance of which was the purpose of all gods. It was understood as 'right' so that the gods were not just preserving the world from physical chaos, but also from moral disorder. *Rta* was very much associated with the right performance of the sacrifice and consequently the Vedas devote considerable space to the scrupulous carrying out of the various rites.

The *Rg Veda* concludes with a prayer for harmony and peace, with the help of *Agni* and by a union of hearts and oneness of Spirit:

United your resolve, united your hearts,  
May your spirits be at one  
That you may long together dwell  
In unity and harmony." (X, 191, 4)

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<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Vanderwilt, *A Church Without Borders* (Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 1998), 150.

In all Indian/Asian religions, including the primal religions, harmony is a priced value. Asia is known for its spirituality of harmony. It constitutes “the intellectual and effective, religious and artistic, personal and societal soul of both persons and institutions in Asia.”<sup>2</sup> Seeking harmony with the divine and with nature within and around humans has been the Asian way of life. This is amply verified by the hospitality extended to the different religions. India, thus, wholeheartedly welcomed the Zoroastrians, fleeing persecution in Iran. The nascent Christian faith too found a welcoming home in the Indian soil. Harmony implies the recognition and respect for the other. It is not an imposed unity or uniformity. Neither is it a merging but an upholding of the individuality of the other with whom one lives in concord.

In the Bible too we come across this esteemed role of harmony. The Israelites lived in harmony with others, in the context of their consciousness of their own identity, which they lived with the awareness of God as the Lord of all peoples and history. The universal and cosmic covenants show how all nations have a place in Yahweh’s plan. Yahweh desires order and cosmic harmony as reflected in the earlier prophets of Israel as Hosea (Hos 2: 20). Later prophets like Isaiah present universal harmony as the ideal (Is 11: 6-8). The concept of the Kingdom in the New Testament retrieves the Old Testament idea of harmony. Ephesians 1: 10 proclaims a universal harmony and cosmic reconciliation between things in heaven and things on earth. Hence our understanding of Jesus Christ must lead us to situate ourselves to live in authentic harmony with our brothers and sisters in Asia.

## **2. The Christology of Complementarity**

The biblical justification for a Christology of Complementarity can be categorized in the following headings: Creation, Wisdom Literature, the Pre-existent Word and Incarnation with the ministry of the Historical Jesus.

### *1. Creation*

In the Bible we have an all-encompassing divine plan manifested in the story of creation. God’s universal vision unfolds in the creation of heaven and earth culminating in the creation of humans in God’s own image (Gen 1: 1-26). Similarly the Bible ends with the universal vision

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2 BIRA IV/1, in *For All the Peoples of Asia*, G Rosales & G Arevalo, Eds. (New York: Orbis, 1992), 249.

of the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21-22). For our purpose what is important is the underlying Christological dimension of creation. God creates everything through God's Word, in the Spirit (Gen 1:1f). This Christological dimension of creation is found later in the New Testament where it affirms that creation is, through, by and for Jesus Christ (Col 1: 15-17; Eph 1: 10).

The biblical creation narrative leads us to have an inclusive vision, to include the whole cosmos as part of the divine plan in Jesus Christ. As Irenaeus held, creation was not the end but the beginning of God's relation with humans. Creation is the very beginning of history. In other words, history is not the result of human sin. What God made at "the beginning" was only the initial part, which was expected to develop later through a historical process.<sup>3</sup> Thus the incarnate Word is linked with creation. Creation is not extrinsic to incarnation. Nor is incarnation an after-thought of God or the result of any human act. All history is in God's hands and God leads it through its events to the goals that God has set in Jesus Christ.

The whole cosmos participates in God's self-communication in the Word. It expands, progresses and evolves into fullness in Christ. Hence Teilhard de Chardin could speak of the whole cosmic process as one of Christ-bearing. "The prodigious expanses of time that preceded the first Christians were not empty of Christ, for they were imbued with his power."<sup>4</sup> The Johannine Prologue too dwells on the creative role of the Word (Jn 1:3). Creation, the Self-exteriorization of God, takes place through the Word. Creation as well as Incarnation can be said to be the Self-communication of God *ad extra*.

Creation is an integral part of Revelation. Divine revelation unfolds through word and deed. "The plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity. The deeds manifest and confirm the realities signified by the words," teaches the Council on Revelation (DV 2).

## *2. Mediation of Wisdom*

The Christological dimension of creation is further spelt out in the Wisdom literature. Wisdom was with God before all things and is

3 Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 2.25 in Gonzales, *Christian Thought Revisited* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1999), 29.

4 Tony Kelly, *An Expanding Theology: Faith in a World of Connections* (Newtown: Dwyer, 1993), 74.

associated with all the works of God (Prov.8: 22-36). Here Wisdom is presented as the first creation through which everything else is created (Wis 7: 22; 8:6; etc.). In every generation Wisdom passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God (Wis 7:14). Wisdom is the source of right conduct and teaches the fear of God and justice (Prov 3:7; 8:13). Wisdom is the dispenser of all goodness and God's friendship, the source of salvation to those who welcome her (Wis 6:19-20). Wisdom presides over the destinies of humankind right from the beginning (Wis 10:1-24). Having come from God, Wisdom takes possession of every people and nation (Sir 24:6). Wisdom is all-powerful as God, she is God's counselor and sits on the throne by God's side (Wis 9:4). Wisdom is God's order and counsel and hence it is identified with the Torah (Prov 1-10; Sir 1; 24). Wisdom is the universal mediation of revelation, Grace and holiness. Wisdom literature manifests the ecumenism of the Old Testament.

Later the New Testament authors will identify Jesus with Wisdom (Lk 11:31f; Mt 12:41f; Col 1: 15-17). St. Paul speaks of Christ as the Wisdom of God (1Cor 1: 24). We have a number of texts scattered throughout the New Testament as examples of this identification (Phil 2:6-11; Eph 2:14-16 I Tim 3.16; etc.). The early Christological hymns such as Col 1:15-20; Phil 2:6-11; Jn 1: 1-18; etc., express the early community's faith that Jesus, the incarnate Wisdom of God, had a cosmic role in creation and salvation.

Commenting on the Johannine Word, Raymond Brown points out how John was influenced by the personified divine Wisdom as described in the Old Testament.<sup>5</sup> The use of 'Word' developed significantly by Philo. He calls the logos the first born who holds the eldership among the angels, their ruler as it were (*Conf.*146), 'the interpreter and prophet of God' (*Immut.*138). The God in whose image Adam was made according to Genesis 1: 27 was the logos, who is even called a second God (*Quest.Gen.*2.62).<sup>6</sup>

### *3. The Pre-existent Word*

The Prologue can be qualified as the Johannine genealogy of Jesus

5 Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John* (I-XII) (Garden City: Double Day & Co., 1966), cxxii.

6 Christopher Tuckett, *Christology and the New Testament : Jesus and His Earliest Followers* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2001), 31.

Christ. Though the preexistence of Jesus Christ is not absent in the Synoptic Gospels, only John describes the activity of the Pre-existent Word that became Jesus of Nazareth.

The Word that became incarnate is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was God and was with (the)<sup>7</sup> God from the beginning. With the use of the imperfect *en* (was), throughout verses 1 and 2, John brings out the timelessness of the activity of both God and the Word, which are described thereafter. The salvific activity of God in the Word is an eternal one, preceding even creation. For the Jews it was the Word of God, the creative agent in Genesis, the prophetic agent in the prophets, and the source of Wisdom in the Wisdom literature. The Word was the divine power operative in history exercising power and presence.<sup>8</sup> The Hebrew notion of the Logos, thus, is more functional.

No doubt, the focus of the prologue is the advent of the pre-existent Logos into the world at a certain moment in history. But at the same time it asserts the universality of the work of Logos. The world is Word-permeated as everything was made through him (1.3). The Word is the source of life and this life is the light that enlightens every human being coming into the world (1: 4-5,9). This describes the revelatory character of the Word in creation.

As E.D. Miller has pointed out, in John 1: 1-5 we have four strophes, each making an assertion about Logo's relation to something, and in each strophe to something different. Thus the first strophe is about Logos in his personal relation to God, the second is about his creative relation to the world, strophe three expresses the Logos in his incarnate relation to humans and strophe four turns our attention to the Logos' victorious relation to evil.<sup>9</sup> These themes recur through out the rest of the Gospel. It begins with the "beginning" and thus the whole human history is assumed into the four strophes. The incarnation is the visible concrete presentation of the four themes.

Through the prologue John makes history a theological category due to the salvific presence of the Word. Nowhere in the New Testament

7 The Greek version of Johannine Gospel uses the definitive article with God, giving the possibility of making a difference between the divinity of the Word and of the Absolute divinity of God.

8 Brennan Hill, *Jesus the Christ: Contemporary Perspectives* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 213.

9 E.D. Miller, *Salvation History in the Prologue of John* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 91.

do we find the empirical historical reality so permeated by the divine as we do in John due to the presence of the Logos. Incarnation is in relation to and in continuity with the other states of God's saving activity in Logos. The pre-creation, creation, Incarnation and the present are the four stages of the activity of the Logos. Due to this all-pervading activity of the Logos graphically narrated in the prologue, St. Augustine in his *City of God* approvingly quotes a Platonic philosopher who is reported to have said that the first five verses of the prologue must be written in gold and displayed in the most prominent places in every Church.<sup>10</sup>

St. Paul in his letter to the Colossians presents Christ as the mediator of creation and salvation and insists how Christ's mediatory role extends to all things, seen and unseen, in heaven and on earth (1: 15-17). The same cosmic dimension continues in his letter to the Ephesians. Christ plays a central role in reconciling all things in heaven and on earth, thereby opening the way for a Christology that is cosmic in scope (1: 9-10).<sup>11</sup>

Thus, in the Prologue, as well as in the early Christological Hymns, we find a theological connection between God's action in creation and Jesus Christ. Everything in creation bears the mark of the Word, the divine reaching out to the world. God had God's salvific plan close to God from the beginning. All history and every single thing that happened took place through the mediation of the Logos. The world is the realm of the revealing Word. Logos who became flesh in Jesus of Nazareth is already with God in whom the entire divine mystery of salvation is already hidden. The whole creation stands bathed in the light of salvation through the Logos.

#### *4. The Incarnate Word*

The Logos who was present in the world from the beginning, and prefigured in the Old Testament as the *dabar* (word: Gen 1:3), and the *hokma* (wisdom), as the agent of creation, and the ground of the divine self-manifestation and the source of salvation, in the fullness of time (Gal 4:4) became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1: 14). If Jn 1: 1-5 describes the revealing work of the Word in creation, Jn 1: 14 onwards

10 St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* x,29.PL 41.307.

11 In this paper I do not enter into a discussion of the Pauline theology of justification and atonement. Obviously there is an enormous difference between the language and thinking of Jesus as presented by the gospels and Paul.

is the description of the revealing work of the Word Incarnate. Through the signs and discourses the incarnate Word manifests God so that at the end of his ministry he can say “those who have seen me have seen the Father (14:9).

Incarnation is the visible and concrete presentation of the Word who is operative in the world from “the beginning,” enabling us to “see and touch his glory.” The whole ministry of Jesus was the manifestation of the true divine nature in human form. In Jesus we encounter the divine in the fullest form as far as the humans are concerned. The picture that emerges from the earthly ministry of Jesus in the Gospels is that he was intensely conscious of God as his intimate *abba* and that he was anointed and sent to proclaim the arrival of God’s reign. The reign of God was central to his ministry. Though throughout his ministry he manifested God as the *abba*, God as such was not his main concern, but the reign of God as realized in him. He showed that when we accept the neighbour fully, when we include the excluded, the marginalized, the lonely, the little ones, the sinners, etc., all of whom he characterized as the poor (Lk 4: 18; Mt 11:6; etc.), we encounter God.

It has also to be kept in mind that the mission of the Incarnate Word was not a religious one in the sense that at no point of his ministry did he try to change the religion of the people. In fact he was a Jew, though a counter-cultural one. As a Jewish prophet he wants to die in Jerusalem, though he dies on the periphery of the city as a criminal.

Likewise, contrary to the presumption of the existing atonement theology, nowhere in the ministry of Jesus do we come across Jesus trying to change God’s attitude to humans, except perhaps on the cross when he asks forgiveness for his executioners Lk 23:34). Nor do the four Gospels justify the Pauline atonement theology except for one or other isolated text, which in fact can be explained without recourse to the atonement theory<sup>12</sup>. In the Gospels the crucifixion is the result of the ministry. The ministry leads to his death (Mk 3:6; 12:12 and par).

### *5. The Mystery of the Word*

From the foregoing reflections it is obvious that just as there is only one God, regardless of by whichever name that God is addressed, that

12 Interestingly, none of the Scriptural Scholars whom E.P. Sanders reviewed as to their view on the purpose or aim of Jesus and the reason for his death, has said that the passion and death was an atonement, but as somehow related to his ministry (E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, (London: SCM, 1987), 3-58).

God reaches to humans only through one Mystery, which Christian Tradition identifies as the Person of Jesus Christ. What is important is the reality and not the name. The names, Logos, Wisdom, Word, etc., are cultural.

On the other hand, the reality itself is beyond human grasp. Scriptural scholar John P Meier has shown how we cannot know the total reality of Jesus of Nazareth with all his thoughts, words, deeds, feelings, etc., but only the Historical Jesus that is the scientific reconstruction based on the Gospels and other available sources.<sup>13</sup> If so, how much less do we know the Word. "If the Historical Jesus is not the real Jesus, neither is the "theological Jesus" investigated by theologians according to their own proper methods and criteria," observes Meier.<sup>14</sup> Hence it is better to refer to the Mystery for the reality of the Word. Mystery was used by St. Paul in his letters (Eph 1:9; Rom 16:25; Col 1:26, etc.). More significantly, Mystery would be acceptable to the followers of other religions in the context of Inter Religious Dialogue.

Humans, limited as they are, cannot reach out to the Transcendent unless the Transcendent himself takes the initiative. In the Bible this initiative, we have seen, is described in terms of the enlightening activity of the Word. Religions are the social and historical expressions of the human response to this divine initiative, divine revelation. Hence, all religions are supernatural, or revealed, though as human responses, they can be mixed with limitations as well.

Though all religions participate in the Mystery, no religion, including Christianity, can claim an exclusive and exhaustive monopoly of that Mystery. In *Lumen Gentium* Vatican II asserted that the fullness of the divine reign is an eschatological reality and the Church is straining towards that fullness (n 5). If so the realization of the fullness of the Mystery too is eschatological.

Every religion, in so far as it stands under the enlightening activity of the Word, participates in the Mystery of the Word. Each religion has its own role and function and is salvific through the creative activity of God in and through the Word. John Paul II distances himself from every form of exclusivism that prevents a real and respectful dialogue

13 John P Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Vol 2 (New York: ABRL Doubleday, 1994), 9.

14 Ibid.

with other religions, by affirming the real possibility of salvation in these religions (*Redemptoris Missio* 9-10). Christian openness to the followers of other religions flows from the Christian faith in God who has manifested God's self through creation in Word. A Christian is called to continue the ministry of the Incarnate Word. This according to the Gospels is to work for the realization of the divine Reign, by manifesting the human face of God in our lives as it happened in the ministry of the Incarnate Word. "As the Father has sent me so do I send you," instructs the Risen Lord in the Johannine Gospel (20: 21). This mission of witnessing to what happened in the Incarnate Word entails also a willingness to affirm what God has done among all peoples through God's Word.

### **3. Space for Complementarity**

In the light of what we have seen, we are impelled in our understanding and spelling out of Christology to be open to the presence of the Mystery, the pre-existent Word, in other Religions. Even as God's love is eternal and universal, so too God's mission. Divine mission is the externalization, concretization of the divine love in the Word. In this sense we can speak of God's mission beginning with creation. It is at the same time a proclamation of God's salvation in the Mystery of Jesus Christ. Due to the personal character of divine dealing this mission ultimately takes a human character. That is the meaning of Incarnation. The entire ministry of Jesus was rendering visibility, tangibility and concreteness to the divine love. So much so, time and again, people exclaim how the power of God was manifested in him.

The Gospel of Mark explicitly reminds us how this love and mission is not confined to the community of the disciples alone. It is to be found outside the Jesus' circle as well. Jesus reproves the disciples who complained about 'others' casting out demons (9:38). Marcan Jesus gives Jonah as the great sign of conversion of the Ninevites and he praises the faith of the Syrophoenician woman (7: 24-30). Jesus performs the miracles even outside the Jewish territory such as the healing of the deaf man in the region of Decapolis (7:31-37) and the feeding of the 4000 in a territory presumed to be gentile (8: 1-10).

In his very inaugural address at the Nazareth synagogue, the Lucan Jesus, while quoting from the prophet Isaiah, leaves out the clause, 'vengeance (to the gentiles)' (Is 61.2b). In the same vein he refers to

the two key Old Testament prophets, Elijah and Elisha who performed their healing or redeeming acts among Gentiles and not among the Israelites. Through this, Jesus portrays how the fulfillment of the text he just quoted, need not be confined to the Israelites or to any one community. We cannot put limits to divine freedom to work in unexpected ways.<sup>15</sup>

While what we have experienced in the Historical Jesus is the basis of the Christian faith commitment and mission, the pre-existent Word is the ground for the search for complementarity. This does not mean a separation of the two or any sort of dualism, but it refers only to different perspectives of the same Mystery. We Christians must realize that Jesus is not so much concerned about the conception we have of his identity as much as our commitment to his mission. When the disciples of John the Baptist approached him enquiring if he were the Messiah, his reply was not focusing on himself, but rather what was happening through him. This is important for the community of his disciples. They must recapture that mission of the realization of God's rule.

The Historical Jesus is focused on the realization of the Kingdom and the manifestation of God's nature. Thus, the Incarnate Word does not exhaust the mission of the Mystery of the Word. What happened in the Incarnate Word is of key significance for the community of his disciples, though it cannot have any claim of exclusive possession of the Mystery. The very identity of the community is the continuation of the ministry of the Incarnate Word though it has no monopoly on the Mystery. This bolsters the need for looking into the very basis of different religions. Christian collaboration with other religions cannot be limited to certain activities such as Inter Religious Dialogue, or some joint ventures for common good, but it must also look into the very being of other religions as permeated by the Mystery that in Christian tradition we identify as Jesus Christ.

At this juncture I must insist that by the Mystery of the Word, I am not speaking about a Cosmic Christ. The term Christ is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew Messiah, literally, the anointed one. It means the expected king and deliverer of the Hebrews. Jesus of Nazareth, believed by his followers to be this long-expected Messiah of the Jews, is for that reason called Christ (Act 2: 22-37). However, the object of

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<sup>15</sup> Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 71.

the expectation, the Messiah, is the Incarnate Word. Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ as regards his mission and resurrection and not his pre-existence.

This in turn leads us to a second issue. Can salvation be described in exclusive terms as the work of the Historical Jesus and available only in the Church? God's salvation reaches humans through the Mystery of the Word. We have already referred to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the logical culmination of his ministry, rather than an expiatory sacrifice. In the light of Jesus' death on the cross, we must over come selfishness and become other-centered. To the extent we conform ourselves to the self-giving love of Jesus Christ we are saved, healed of the tendency to selfishness.

What the early Christological hymns celebrate is the fact that in Jesus, God himself is present and God's salvation reaches us through Jesus Christ. This is not a denial of salvation for other peoples. This challenges the Church to widen its theological horizons to accept the divine plan of religious pluralism and its role in sustaining the followers of these religions in their pilgrimage to salvation, due to the presence of the Mystery of the Word in them. We need greater humility to acknowledge that we do not know all of God or God's plan, nor of the Mystery of the Word through whom God created this mind-boggling universe. What must interest us is not a one-time redemption or justification, but the daily living according to the divine plan inaugurated in the ministry of Jesus Christ. It is in every day life that human life unfolds and humans have to face the problems of life, including that of religious pluralism.

#### **4. Justification for a Christology of Complementarity**

As John Meier underlines, Jesus' own ministry was moulded in the Palestinian context of his times. The historical Jesus can be understood only in relation to the people of his times.<sup>16</sup> The whole concept of Jesus as the Messiah can be understood only in terms of the Jewish hope of one who would liberate the people from all foreign powers and establish them in the true Kingdom in the covenant spirit. The early Church expanded the Jewish idea of the Messiah (Christ) who was to restore Israel in a political way, by showing it was more an eschatological reality anticipated by the casting and healing activities. Hence the second coming was a new dimension added to the Jewish hopes.

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16 Meier, 349.

When we come to the Hellenistic culture, Christ is only a proper name. The burning issue for the Greeks was the understanding of the person, nature and substance of Christ. The Greek mind could not grasp a Jesus Christ who came to manifest the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc., operating in history. The Greeks were accustomed to a God of Plato, Aristotle, Socrates, Plotinus, *et al.*, who was the unmoved mover, uninvolved in the material world. It failed to take the Historical Jesus seriously. The living Christ was lost but the correct academic expression of the faith was the main thing. As John Macquaerie has pointed out, after the Greek inculturation, Christology substantially has remained unchanged, with little contact with the modern mind.<sup>17</sup> This lack of inculturation in Christology accounts for the many theological suspicions and condemnations that we come across today.

Our Christology can be moulded in the concepts and problems of our time. Our major problem is not of substance and nature, but that of religious pluralism and the dehumanized existence of almost one-third of humanity. Here the Greek inculturation can serve as a model and must lead us to a more liberative understanding of Jesus Christ, making our faith meaningful to the contemporary times. Christology is a process of interpretation of our faith experience, experience of God in Jesus Christ, "filtered through the words and deeds, the life, death and resurrection, the mediatorship, and personal presence of Jesus."<sup>18</sup> This is clear already from the existence of the four Gospels each of which is the formal gathering of four streams of such interpretations with different perspectives and characteristics. What God was accomplishing for humans in Jesus Christ is described as the saving love. However the tendency has been to confine this saving love to Christians alone, if not to Catholics only. A Christology of complementarity spurs us to expand our horizons and see how God is a God of human history.

## 5. Missiological Consequences

A practical expression of faith in a Christology of complementarity would be that we assure the followers of other religions that the Christian service is not directed against other religions in any way. In the past somehow mission was interpreted as oriented against the followers of other religions. Christian mission was seen as a threat to other religions,

17 John Macquaerie, *Christology Revisited* (London: SCM Press, 1998), 11.

18 Gerard H Luttenberger, *An Introduction to Christology in the Gospels and Early Church* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 27.

as it was feared, with justification, that the Church with its claim of being the only revealed religion was trying to dislodge other religions. This situation has to be rectified. As John Paul II has taken pains to point out, "Church's mission has only one purpose, to serve humans by manifesting the love of God made present in Jesus Christ" (*Redemptoris Missio* 2). We must acknowledge that we have many things in common with them and we, along with them, travel to a common destiny, the fullness of the Mystery.

On our part we have to convince ourselves that our mission is not measuring the faith of others, nor judging others, but serving others by our faithful following of Jesus. Nor should we try to place ourselves at the center, as the God-intended religion, but must realize that God and God's mission are at the center which reaches out to humans through the Mystery that in the Christian tradition we identify as Jesus Christ. In this perspective, God is the Saviour, not the Church, though the Church is a necessary instrument to continue what was revealed in the Incarnate Word. Just as the Incarnate Word was God with us, *-Emmanuel*, (Mt 1: 23), in every culture the Church has to become present, to make God's presence concrete. The Christian vocation is primarily a call to serve as the salt, light and leaven in the world (Mt 5: 13-15).

Christianity is not a religion in competition with other religions in a religious market, with the attractive wrappings of competitive claims and dogmatic niceties. Christianity is a call to follow Jesus Christ the Word Incarnate in his ministry of going about doing good (Act 10:38), whereby he manifested God's compassion, God's other-centeredness. Such a mission is relevant in all places and cultures. Hence Jesus qualified the identity of this community as salt, light, leaven, etc. When communal violence engulfs us, we should not go about with the medieval ideals and colonialistic type of mission. Rather we have to become the inspiration for reconciliation and love. Jesus' answer to those who informed him that his mother and brothers are seeking him, brings home the key point in mission: All those who seek God's will in their lives are his mother, brothers and sisters. It is not primarily a question of the religious tag (Lk 8:21). We can even misuse the name of Jesus Christ without concern for the divine reign (Mt 7: 21).

Similarly we need to be cautious as not to stretch certain Scriptural texts to argue for the necessity of baptism. For instance, the insistence on rebirth in the Spirit (Jn 3:5) is to be understood in the background of the Jewish belief that one becomes part of the people of God by birth

from a Jewish mother. John insists that only a begetting from God produces a child of God and what was born of the flesh is flesh. "He was not dealing with the issue of people who did their best to serve God but had never found Christ proclaimed convincingly enough, especially by example, to warrant belief," writes Raymond Brown.<sup>19</sup>

While we may be concerned with the salvation of the followers of other religions, we Christians have to ask if we go on compromising with an unjust and marginalizing system, can we Christians be saved? We have seen how Jesus was not concerned with the religion of the people, but the lot of the people of his time. He did whatever possible to change that situation and wanted us to do the same.

We have to concentrate on the salvific love manifested in the ministry of Jesus Christ, through which people could experience the arrival of the divine reign already now as the anticipation and projection of the eschatological Kingdom, instead of a salvation interpreted in the light of the Jewish concept of expiation. As Jesus made the Good News a historical reality through his response to the poor, orphans, tax collectors, widows, and all the marginalized, so too the Church must reach out to the suffering, to the lonely, those cast aside, unjustly treated and so on. Thus the Church makes the new age, inaugurated through the ministry of Jesus and confirmed by God by raising Jesus from the dead, to continue through its own ministry.

In this, the Church has to be open to other religions and movements in so far as they too are contributing to the same cause. The Church's faith tells it how they too, in so far as they originate from the same God and are mediated by the same Mystery of the Word, can also be motivated by and participating in the Kingdom.

A Christology of complementarity has to retrieve the Semitic understanding of experience in history, rather than clinging on to claims of Truth. The community will have to ask how Jesus Christ and his message can be made alive in each place through the re-presentation, re-actualizing of his ministry in each place. The Semitic idea of the divine reign with its historical, developmental and inclusive way of thinking must accompany our search for a Christology of complementarity.

This brings us to another related issue. Jesus' ministry was a constant relationship on vertical and horizontal levels. Jesus is in touch with God

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19 Raymond Brown, *The Churches the Apostles left Behind* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 82.

and with humans. Jesus re-defined the understanding of holiness from the existing notion of separation to that of relationship, horizontal and vertical (Mk 12: 29-31). What stands out in the ministry of Jesus Christ is the significance he attached to the ‘other’. In our context this other is a religious one and hence his or her religion also merits to be considered as the ‘other’.

## 6. Complementarity Leads to Harmony

A Christology of complementarity leads to harmony among religions in Asia. We have already seen how the Asian spiritual insight is built on Harmony. As John Paul II has stressed, “[B]eing Asian” is best discovered and affirmed not in confrontation and opposition, but in the spirit of complementarity and harmony” (*EA* 6). What makes Christianity unpopular in Asia is its claims of uniqueness. Asians are open to Jesus Christ though they resist Christianity claiming exclusive salvation. Even hard-line organizations like the *Rashtriya Swayam Sevaks* (a fundamentalist Hindu group) would be amenable to a Church with a Christology of Complementarity reaching out to others. These groups have repeatedly expressed their acceptance of the St. Thomas Christians who lived in harmony with their neighbours of other faiths.

Harmony was not foreign to Christianity. The Christian community in India, tracing its origin to St. Thomas, the Apostle, accepted and respected the followers of other religions. This community believed that each religion is salvific to the followers of that religion, a position that was condemned by the Synod of Diamper in 1599.<sup>20</sup> It merits to be mentioned how this is the only instance where Christianity, right from its inception to this day, lived in harmony with its neighbours of other faiths.

This spirit of harmony is reflected in a letter that Pope Gregory VII wrote to the Muslim King Anzir of Mauritania in 1076 thanking him for the gifts that the King had sent to the Pope and for freeing some of the Christian prisoners. The Pope wrote: “God, the Creator of all, ..., has inspired in your heart this act of kindness. He who enlightens all people coming into the world (Jn 1:9) has enlightened your mind for this purpose. Almighty God, who desires all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:4) and none to perish, is well pleased to approve in us most of all that besides loving

<sup>20</sup> A.M. Mundadan, *Paths of Indian Theology* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1998), 39.

God, people love others, and do not do to others anything they do not want to be done unto themselves (Mt 7:12)."<sup>21</sup>

At the height of the fear of the Muslims, when the crusade was raging, St. Francis advocated a peaceful approach to the Muslims. He advised his monks to be subject to other people of another moral code and religion, without denying one's own religion. Francis wrote: "They should begin neither quarrels nor dissensions, but should be subject to every human creature for God's sake and acknowledge that they are Christians" (Rule of 1221 16).<sup>22</sup> The witness of fraternal harmony and conciliatory approach, even when religions were at war, seemed more important for Francis.

The same spirit of harmony we see upheld by other thinkers like Ramon Llull (1232-1316) and Nicholas of Cusa (1401-61). Llull propagated an ideal of unity for the sake of peace, of human unity that would reflect divine unity, doing away with 'difference and contrariety' and leaving only 'concordance'.<sup>23</sup> Llull insisted also that search for such a harmony requires a language that is not just of pure reason and knowledge, but of love. In his *Libre d'Amic e Amat* he wrote:

The bird was singing in the beloved's orchard. The lover came and said to the bird: if we cannot understand each other through languages, then let us understand one another through love, for in your song my beloved is conjured up in my eyes.<sup>24</sup>

We come across the spirit of harmony in another important work, "The Peace of Faith" (*De pace fidei*) of Nicholas of Cusa (1401-61). The work is all the more significant, as Dupuis has drawn our attention to, not only because the author of the work was a Cardinal of the Church, but more so due to the timing of its publication, 1454, 12 years after the Council of Florence that upheld the axiom, "Outside the Church no salvation," and just one year after the fall of Constantinople into the

21 In *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, J. Dupuis (New York: Orbis, 1997), 102.

22 See *We are Sent A Program of Study on the Franciscan Missionary Chrarism*, (Franciscan Instaitute of Spirituality in India: Bangalore, n.d), 58.

23 J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 107.

24 Raimon Panikkar, "Philosophy as Intracultural Transgression," in *Crossing the Borders* (eds) Anand Amaladass & Rosario Rocha (Chennai: Satya Nilayam Publications, 2001), 10.

hands of the Turks, that shook the whole of Western world.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to the spirit of the Crusades, the Cardinal advocates peace between different faiths and calls for a conference in which experts will seek an agreement between religions and thus ensure peace.

John Paul II was promoting that spirit of dialogue through his various endeavours such as the Assisi Conference of the Religious Leaders (October 1986) and his Apostolic Journeys. In this connection one must see the significance of the many addresses of John Paul II, especially in Asia, though not exclusively in Asia, where he tells the world that the Church that he heads, does not harbour any design of swallowing other religions, but in the spirit of the great Council, Vatican II, is ready to collaborate with others to make the world more humane, more Kingdom-like.

In its mission, the Asian Church has to take all this into consideration. Christianity is not a religion of certain dogmas but a religion of relationship. If so, this relationship has to be extended to all. In this perspective Jesus Christ is not just a cosmic myth, but a Person, a Mystery that is present and alive in the whole history, including all religions. Christianity stands for a relationship of cosmic dimensions.

### **Conclusion**

What we have tried to articulate are some orientations spelling out an understanding of Jesus Christ in the Asian context. We have not gone into the various puzzles of Christology. However, we have departed from the traditional approach to Christology as God's involvement in a world already made. We have rolled Christology back to the beginningless 'beginning'. This, hopefully, can spur in us an attitude of collaboration with the followers of other religions, without compromising the Christian faith in the centrality of Jesus Christ or diluting the Christian commitment. Our aim, thus, has been primarily this Christian openness and collaboration. Making others more responsive to our efforts is only a spin-off from the former. It calls for a deepening of the Christian faith as well as commitment. It is the need of the hour. Pastorally it is a more demanding position, but it is fully in consonant with the biblical spirit and it seeks to be relevant and meaningful to the Asian context.

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25 J. Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology*, 107.

# **Witnessing to Christ in the Dalit Context**

**A. Maria Arul Raja**

Witnessing to Christ in the Dalit context calls for a deeper understanding of the religious, social, cultural and economic life of the Dalits who are victims of oppression and discrimination inflicted on them by the dominant castes. The Dalit religiosity is quite much attuned to Jesus' orientation towards here-and-now dimension of God's intervention, material needs of daily bread, security of life or the compelling urgency of healing the sick. His close proximity to the excluded ones, especially in terms of bodily touch, is an effective antidote to the arbitrary evil of untouchability of his time. By and large, the Dalits among the Indian subalterns suffer the hardships and pain to produce life-giving food. The human-body-becoming-the-food-for-others is the fertile ground for an involved dialogue between the Dalits and Christ.

Witnessing to Christ is expressed in multiple forms and symbols.<sup>1</sup> But against the backdrop of the endangered life experienced by exploitation and discrimination, the Indian Dalits, through their on-going struggles for attaining the fullness of life, are the living witnesses bearing testimony to protection and promotion of life. And hence the presentation of Christ to them has to look into their historical pursuits of becoming fully human in a dignified manner on a par with others. In other words, the Christology evolved from elsewhere or the Dalit location should enable them to perceive, articulate, and celebrate their identity, self-worth and empowerment.

If Christ is presented through transcendentalism, other-worldly powers, one-way traffic of the grace or revelation, *œabda pramana* or

1 In the NT itself we come across the symbols of Son of God, Son of David, Lamb of God, Prophet, Messiah, the suffering Son of Man, self-emptying Servant, Way, Word, Shepherd, Light, living Water, Bread of Life, King, High Priest, and so on. The prominent among the Indian symbols are *Avatar*, *Guru*, *Marga Bandu*, *Œabda*, and so on. At the mystical and personal levels he is seen through the symbols of Father, Mother, Friend, Baby, Spouse, and so on.

texts favouring literacy, he fails to evoke Dalit hearts and minds. These may not be the mainline categories in Dalit encounter of life. Rather differential and disadvantaged historical memories of the collective Dalit consciousness articulated in a major way through oral traditions will be the platform upon which their mythologies are constructed. What matters, here, then, is insight rather than instruction, bodily site than ideal site, action than reflection. Word-based concepts, texts or discourses may not occupy the matrix of Dalit Christology in which inter-subjective (divine-human and human-human) communication of meaning occurs.

### **Christ and Dalit Culture**

The models of encountering Christ by cultures are manifold.<sup>2</sup> They could be spelt out as follows: Christ placed (1) against culture (2) as the fulfiller of cultures (3) and culture in paradox (4) above culture, and (5) as the transformer of culture. Dalits with their subaltern religio-cultural location readily welcome their encounter with Christ through Jesus-event as their dialogical partner. This readiness is in-built in their agenda of transforming their condition of being marginalised to the process of becoming dignified co-humans with others on equal footing. In this dialogical encounter Dalits do not discover the meaning of Jesus as mere substance or being but primarily as the co-sufferer leading them to the new heights of realising the human-divine continuum. This realisation enables the Dalits to get awakened to transform their suffering as a historical opportunity in a creative manner in their journey towards integral emancipation.<sup>3</sup>

### **Material Texture**

The Dalit consciousness is predominantly earth-bound with concrete historical details. It is well expressed through their linguistic utterances with no pretensions of refined diplomacy or sophisticated abstractions.<sup>4</sup> It could be explained in terms of their close placement with the soil, sweat, corpse, or even the human excreta as the agrarian laborers or menial workers. No doubt, the context creates the consciousness and colours it.

2 Cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

3 A. Maria Arul Raja, *Dalit Encounter with Their Suffering: An Emancipatory Interpretation of Mark 15:1-47 from a Dalit Perspective* (unpublished thesis-Chennai: University of Madras, 2000).

4 Of the recent outburst of Dalit literature in various languages printed in the very way that the Dalits express themselves we can cite Bama, *Oru Thathavum Yerumaiyum: Short Stories* (Coimbatore: Vidiyal Pathippagam, 2003).

The material texture of the Dalit religiosity is quite much attuned to Jesus' orientation towards here-and-now dimension of God's intervention, material needs of daily bread, security of life or the compelling urgency of healing the sick. His close proximity to the excluded ones, especially in terms of bodily touch, is an effective antidote to the arbitrary evil of untouchability of his time.

By and large, the Dalits among the Indian subalterns "suffer the hardships and pain of agricultural labour to produce the life-giving food"<sup>5</sup>. The human-body-becoming-the-food-for-others is the fertile ground for an involved dialogue between the Dalits and Christ. "The Eucharistic meal that Jesus has left us is a symbol both of community and mutual self-gift, sharing and service"<sup>6</sup>. Here the Dalit service and contribution to the humanity at large is outstandingly their very pursuit of the agenda of annihilation of every brand of discriminatory hierarchy including that of the caste system even from the very imagination of the human world.

No to "either-or" but yes to "both-and"

The Dalit way of encountering life does not seem to favour the Brahminic-Pharisaic modes of dichotomising reality as binary opposites like sacred-secular, pure-impure, eternal-temporary, other worldly- this worldly or permanent-impermanent. Since their ethical orientation is that of protecting life endangered by caste hegemony, they look forward to every possibility of promoting the same. If so, any form of *a priori* determinism in terms of dogma, canon, and tradition could not be entertained by them. There is an explorative ethics in every conflicting situation they are thrown into.

Even cursory glimpses into Jesus' praxis as transpired through the gospels could spell out the apparently contradicting orientations.

Fulfillment of the law	- Transcending the law
'Turn also the left cheek'	- 'Why did you strike me?'
Historical sense and human responsibility	- Apocalyptic expectations with divine intervention
Reign of God here and now	- Waiting in hope for the Second Coming

5 Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) 141-142. He refers also to John C.B.Webster, *The Dalit Christians- A History* (Delhi: ISPCK) 1996.

6 Michel Amaladoss, "Asians Encountering Jesus: Cultural and Philosophical perspectives", *Quest* 3/2 (November 2004) 5.

Unconditionality of God's love	- Punishment to those insensitive to the poor (Last Judgement/ Rich man in the story of Lazarus)
Forgiveness for seven times seventy	- No forgiveness for those scandalised by the works of God's Spirit
'Let those who have sword carry it'	- 'Put down your sword'
'I have come to bring down fire'	- 'I have come to bring peace' and division'
'I have come to gather the dispersed'	- 'Go and preach to all nations' from among the Israel'
'I and the Father are one'	- 'My God, why have you forsaken me?'

Though the brief survey above is not exhaustive, the contrary orientations as identified in Jesus' praxis are adequate enough to reflect the struggles undergone by the early Christian communities in grappling with the conflict situations they were thrown into. The simultaneous presence of contrary orientations does not favour the 'either-or' fixation but the 'both-and' exploration. That is why the subalterns, of the olden days or contemporary world, are creative in working out new alternatives. Besides their innate intuition, the Dalits could learn a lot of insights from the Christological exploration of the early Christian communities while grappling with their conflict-ridden situation.

### Purity and Pollution

"In a society in which purity-pollution becomes the central principle of social organisation, a religiosity centred on sacredness is an effort to exclude the 'impure'; it serves as an ideological device (sic) for the subordination of the subalterns like the Dalits."<sup>7</sup> But on the other hand the Dalit world-view does not subscribe to this dichotomy of the 'sacred-profaneness' which is based on the arbitrary attributions of the Brahminic hegemony. Their criterion for the 'pure' is the ethically riveted upon the principle of promoting the human dignity and for the 'impure' is on what negates it.

The praxis of Jesus was an unrelenting critique of the 'map of purity and pollution' upheld by the Pharsees, the Temple authorities, and the other elite who excluded large masses of the labour class in direct touch

7 Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) 152. He refers also to Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and Its Implications* (Delhi: OUP, 1978) and Bhagwan das, "Dalits and Caste System", in James Massey (ed.), *Indigenous People* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994).

with soil, sweat, blood, pus, saliva, corpse or the gentiles. His criterion for the close proximity with God is the unmasked acceptance of the others, especially those condemned to be 'impure' by the ruling elite minority in the politico-cultural realm of his time. The 'sacred' perceptively identified in the Samaritans, the children, the tax collectors, the sinful (sinned against?) or sick women is extolled by Jesus as a public declaration to be known by all. This inclusive orientation embracing the so-called 'impure' (gentiles and have-nots) became the heritage of the early Christian communities after much struggle and painful deliberations.

Realising the gravity of the inclusive ideology that Jesus stood for and the price that he had to pay for it, the Dalits are hopeful of ushering in an egalitarian society divested of any hierarchical discrimination. But the burden of the historical task of initiating and sustaining the process of reconciliation with those who stick on to the same malady falls upon their shoulders along with the recurring quantum of suffering.

### **Spirituality in Suffering**

The Dalits wander through the winding path of unpredictable future. Their stories are punctuated with travails as well as triumphs. While claiming their legitimate space, their memories of being uprooted as refugees in their own land are charged with reminiscences of hope as well as despair.

The story of the death of Jesus as the result of his defiant opposition to the legalistic norms of the religious and political realms makes an easy entry into the Dalit minds and hearts as the protecting god (*kaaval deivam*) in deep solidarity with their struggle against caste repression. The symbol of crucifix more or less gives them effective impetus on a par with the spiritual energies drawn from the memory stones by them in the remote villages.

The images of the suffering Son of Man and self-emptying Christ do attract the Dalit attention. This *kenosis* resulting in the humiliating murder of Jesus was the consequence of his voluntary participation in the lives of the stigmatized and marginalized people of his time. But discourses merely on servanthood with no reference to the possibility of exaltation are eyed with suspicion by the Dalits. Unsolicited exhortations on mere humility and obedience with no awareness of the conflict situations are taken by Dalits only as ruthless humour.

Dalit deities are often historical persons who were violently killed by the dominant groups. They have been victimised for having transgressed the imposed caste norms.<sup>8</sup> In other words, the deification process is intrinsically linked to their acts of defending their personal human dignity or protecting the communitarian concerns. The violent murder of Jesus on the cross, intrinsically related to his solidarity with the marginalised, evokes in the Dalits the spirit of solidarity with him. This sense of solidarity with the Suffering Christ evokes the Dalit zeal for exaltation from the current state of humiliation often with unbridled passion for immediate results.

The final and grand triumph of the Son of Man, self-emptying servant or the victimised lamb was the consequent result of the untold suffering and brutal death. The inevitability of such a cruelty is attributed to the divine necessity. What then is the role of the human agency of the tortured Messiah? When these discourses encounter the Dalit sensibilities, they evoke a vast array of interpretations. Being in close proximity with the caste society, the Dalits too are contaminated with the dubious doctrine of Karma. Sometimes, in the name of the will of God they are expected to maintain an uncritical silence in the face of the imposed order of the ruling elite. If Dalits are led to interpret their own suffering and that of others and Jesus, and at once with the spirit of resilience and revolt, then they will be enthused to encounter their suffering in a creative way. The resilient mode of processing the suffering might help them to delve deep into their wounded psyche and the revolting mode could propel them to shapen their critical consciousness. Otherwise their experience of their suffering could run the risk of being inadvertently exploited by magical consciousness leading them nowhere.

### **Dalit Religious Matrix**

When Christ is presented to the Dalits the following aspects of their religious matrix should be looked into. Otherwise, Christ might get alienated from them and the liberative contributions of his stories to them may not capture their imagination.

Dalit worship is at once iconic as well as aniconic. Though originally aniconic, they incorporated the iconic ethos into their cult, because of close proximity with the caste society coloured by the Brahminic temple-centred outlook. That is why the depiction of the gods and goddesses in the worship places solely owned by the Dalit communities could be the

8 Felix Wilfred, *The Sling of Utopia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2005) 142.

unseasoned raw stones with no roof upon them or the well-made sculptures made out of mud or other cheap materials. The metallic icons with their exorbitant costs may not suit the slender budgets of the Dalit communities. The pouring out of costly materials like milk, honey, fruit-mixture (*panchâmirtham*) is not the standard practice prevalent among the Dalits.

The decorations of the deities, both within the make-shift mini temples or in the car (*ther*), by and large, are of the natural (leaves and flowers) and inexpensive materials (plastic pieces or paper bits). Dazzling colours for these materials are preferably chosen for arresting the attention of the eyes.

The duality experienced due to imposed social stigma (social death vs human dignity) is sought to be resolved through the roars of such divine cries. On the plane of the religious rituals there may be an ambiguity whether they might emerge victorious or not. But these assertive cries of the divine roar become the soteriological vehicle insofar as they enable the eruption of the hope of a new life of equality as the dignified co-human with others.

The Dalit experience of divinity could be characterized as the agrarian pluralism of deities. These deities emerge from the humans as a continuum. And the mother goddesses, compassionate as well as ferocious, play a vital and indispensable role in their world. If the dominant male God is projected at the cost of the image of the female goddesses, then perhaps the Dalits might feel a vacuum in such spiritual or theological schools.

The respect paid to the dead is quite profound in the Dalit world. The food consumed or the materials used by the dead ones are specially offered to the dead ones on their graveyard. Interestingly each event of remembering the dead is the marked with the collective meal in memory of them. The memory and the meal are the inseparables in the Dalit world. The aspect of collectively shared meal is the hallmark of the practices of animal sacrifice. And hence the image of Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world and the Eucharistic meal as his body broken and his blood spilled as a ransom for many are quite much evocative in the Dalit spiritual realm. The communitarian (Eucharistic) meal in memory of the dead who was killed as the martyr for having had the fellowship meal with the so-called polluted ones is also in tune with the Dalit sensibility. The Pauline admonition to the Corinthians to incorporate the essential element of incorporating the weak (both in economy and growth of consciousness) in the Eucharistic meal is quite vibrant with the Dalit dream of community-building.

Prophetic oracles construed as the enunciation of God's will through the medium of possessed humans is a celebrated aspect of Dalit religio-cultural world. Such oracles (*kuri sollurathu* or *saamiaattam*) are actively found for authoritatively addressing the situation of personal deprivation or societal need.

Prophetic defiance of the imposed order of the rulers is the endearing theme attuned to the Dalit culture of disobedience to caste norms. When the elite, be it from within or outside of the Jewish world, is admonished in the prophetic texts for the excesses committed against the disempowered, the Dalit self-assertion is reinvigorated. When oracles of consolations are addressed they regain their composure in order to encounter the inimical world with confidence and courage.

Such awareness about the Dalit religious matrix could enrich the quality of the dialogue between them and those who seek to bear witness to Christ in their context.

## Conclusion

The Dalit agenda in creating a world order free from every form of discriminatory hierarchy and permanent pollution is ready for dialogue with any religio-cultural experience. They readily welcome Christ when his message of universal embrace of the divine is proclaimed. When they encounter Christ, they find a co-sufferer in deep solidarity with them as a protector god amidst their deities martyred for having assertively promoted the Dalit cause of creating a new egalitarian world. Jesus' ways of building a new human community of equals through self-sacrificing Eucharist awakens the Dalits to go beyond their own microcosmic community needs and challenges them to grow as a community-building community. The message of the risen and the exalted Christ enables them to historicise the dream of reaping hope even out of despair. The Dalits intuitively identify that the prophetic intervention of Christ's message, transforming both the victims and the victimizers, cannot be damped by fixed forms of language. That is why it creates new creative responses in the Dalit minds and hearts ever explorative in every conflict situation.

Context-sensitive witnessing to Christ in Dalit context is capable of enabling them to bear witness to life both unto themselves and others, and even unto those who refuse to see the divine-human continuum in their battered bodies and wounded psyche of the victims of human history.

# **Jesus Christ an Adivasi and Ancestor: A Theological Reflection from the Adivasi Perspective**

**John B. Mundu**

In the context of the experience of political, economic and religio-cultural oppression, exploitation and marginalization of the Adivasis by outsiders there are many life affirming structures and liberation movements within the Adivasi community. In this struggle of the Adivasis to regain their life of well-being and communion what would be a meaningful understanding of Jesus Christ that would empower them to achieve their goal ? The image of Jesus, the Word, who dwells with God being the real *Adivasi* and *Ancestor* can bring about the integral liberation of the present day Adivasis.

Jesus' question "Who do you say I am?" (Mk. 8:29) is an abiding invitation to everyone or community to answer it in a fresh way. The Jewish community gave answer to Jesus' question basically in terms of one of the Prophets who lived in the past (i.e. John the Baptist, Elijah or any of the prophets). Peter (and his companions) recognized Jesus as Christ (the anointed one) – in terms of the past and future fused into the present. The former represented that stream of historical consciousness which interpreted the present experiences of Jesus in terms of the past tradition, but the latter represented the one which interpreted the present experiences in terms of the expectation for 'the Anointed One' ('the one who will save his people from their sins' - future) in the 'here and now' (present history). The Adivasis, then, must not merely repeat the words of the scripture like 'Christ' (the Messiah – the one who saves his people from their sins), but re-interpret this apostolic experience of 'Jesus as Messiah' in the present context.

I do not intend to treat in this paper how Christ was preached among the Adivasis and how the Christian community was established by the evangelizers among the Adivasis of India. I shall limit myself to the offering of a contemporary answer to the question which Jesus asked

his disciples, "Who do the you say that I am?" (Mk.8:29). Anyone who is a believer or interested in Christ or is confronted by Christ (cf. Act 9:5-6)<sup>1</sup> cannot avoid that question. In fact, to speak about Jesus 'yesterday and today is an uninterrupted attempt to respond to the question, "who is Jesus and what does he signify for human existence."<sup>2</sup> Hence, my Christological reflection is situated on the horizon of a twofold experience: (a) the experience of political, economic and religio-cultural oppression, exploitation and marginalization of the Adivasis by the *dikus* (outsiders dominant Hindu fundamentalist forces and allies); (b) the experience of the life affirming structures and liberation movements within the Adivasi community which seeks to drive out exploiters and to search for a new way and structure of human living, new which is more open to the indigenous sense of reality focusing on the ontological interrelationship, intercommunion and interdependence of the divine, human and cosmic sphere of life. The experience of resistance on the part of the dominated Adivasis, but undefeated community working in a situation of intimidation and extermination, and refusing to let the spark of hope die by aligning with the Christian movement and asserting the Adivasi identity, characterizes the second experience. This way of reflection presupposes a situation of enslavement, resistance to be kept a captive and possibility of liberation.

Jesus was misunderstood by his own people (socio-economic-political and religiously powerful group represented by the Sanhedrin, the Pharisees and scribes). Only the 'sinners', the marginalized ones recognized him as the saviour (the Messiah). It is for the simple reason that the powerful wanted to retain their position in the oppressive social structures which gave them power, position and possessions. Later wherever Jesus was preached it was the marginalized of the society which recognized him as their saviour but the powerful always rejected him and persecuted those who believed in him. Jesus with his Good News always empowers and invites the people to change their present unsalvific structures and ways of relationships. This is happening in India also where Jesus and his followers are considered 'aliens' and hence they are marginalized and persecuted by the socially, politically, religiously and economically powerful Hindu community (which is

1 The passage is a fine description of Jesus' encounter with Saul and leading him to redefine his understanding of Christ. Not only Saul (unbeliever in Jesus) becomes Paul (a believer in Jesus), but becomes a proclaimer of Jesus' life and works to the ends of the world.

2 Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Times* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 140.

represented by the Sangh Pariwar). It is a fact that the Good News is inviting the communities of India to transform their oppressive social structure and inter-relationships and live as people belonging to a large world community of communities based on mutual love guided by the principles of justice, equality and dignity.

It is an accepted fact that “the Gospels are above all a theological interpretation of the events rather than an objective and disinterested description of the historical Jesus of Nazareth.”<sup>3</sup> Each evangelist sees the same Jesus – but with his own eyes (context).<sup>4</sup> Hence Mark presents Jesus as a hidden Messiah-Christ and the great liberator; Matthew portrays Jesus as the Messiah –Christ, prophesied and the awaited one, the New Moses; Luke presents Jesus as the liberator of the poor, the sick, sinners, the socially and religiously marginalized ones; John sees in Jesus the eternal Son of God, the Logos who pitches his tent among the people in order to become the way, bread, life; Paul experiences the resurrected Christ and presents him as a new humanity, the saviour for the totality of histories. The Adivasi community can encounter Christ through the witness of the Scripture and the tradition of the Christian community (the church). The titles referred to in the Scripture were the result of what the apostles have heard, seen with their own eyes, touched with their own hands and watched (1Jn. 1:1) and were understood in the Christian tradition differently by different groups. So the present Adivasi community must find a new answer to Jesus’ question and do not repeat what the first generation of Adivasi community had.

In terms of historical background, the St. Thomas Christians of the Syro Malabar and Syro Malanakara rites constitute the first and the oldest Christian groups in India. It is a general belief that St Thomas, one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus, came to India and preached Christ.<sup>5</sup> Hence, Jesus Christ is a native of the Asian continent by his birth (Jesus was born in Palestine) and to India through the preaching of St. Thomas. The preaching of St. Thomas was limited to the southern coasts. So the greater part of India remained untouched by Christian preaching and witness. With the Western European economic and political expansion during the fifteenth to nineteenth century the meaningfulness of Christ and his message spread in the Indian subcontinent. The Christian communities among the Adivasis of Chotanagpur also took root in the context of British colonial experience, as late as 1845 with the arrival of

3 *Ibid.*, p. 3., 4. *Ibid.*, pp. 5-7.

5 See Varkey Vithayatil, “Mission and Life of St. Thomas in India” in The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India edited by George Menachery, vol. 2 (Trichur: St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India, 1973), pp. 2-4.

the first four G.E.L. pastors—Emil Schatz, August Brandt, Friedrich Batsch and Theodore Janke on November 2, 1845<sup>6</sup>. The Anglicans came in 1869. Finally, the Catholic missionaries in the person of Fr. Augustus Stockman who arrived in Chaibasa, an area inhabited by the Ho Adivasis, in July 19, 1869 in Chotanagpur. On November 8, 1873, 28 Mundas were baptized at Khuntpani, halfway between Chaibasa and Chakradharpur. The real movement to accept the Catholic faith began when Fr. Constant Lievens<sup>7</sup> arrived in Chotanagpur on March 18, 1885. Today a fairly large Christian Adivasi community is established which comprises of Mundas, Hos, Uraons, Kharias, Santals and other Adivasi communities. A brief comment is needed in order to offer an adequate answer to Jesus' question.

From what we know of the early encounter of the Adivasis with Christ, Adivasis met Christ as embodied in the persons of the European pastors of various denominations – Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic. The context of the Adivasis was characterized by double colonialism: on the one hand, the Hindu kings and their men, thikedars and landlords of non-Adivasi origins (*dikus* – outsiders) oppressed and exploited the Adivasis, and on the other, the British colonizers (external colonization) introduced new laws and systems of political, economic and social dynamics among the Adivasis in place of their agrarian life which was based on the ontological principles of intercommunion and equality, and interdependent relationship among the divine, human and cosmic spheres of life. Internally, the Adivasis were beset with the inherent fear of the evil ‘spirits’ and witchcraft, and experience of inability of their ancestors and their God to defend them from the outsiders at the religio-cultural sphere. In addition they were subjected to the blessings and curse of nature. All these forces together reduced the Adivasis to the situation of poverty, oppression, dehumanization, peripherization and extermination. It is in such a situation of conflict and captivity the European pastors came with the liberating figure and message of Christ. They concretized it in the acts of service with the view of exorcising the ‘demons’ (*dikus*,

<sup>6</sup> See a brief history of the early works of the Church in Peter Tete, “*The Christian Mission and Tribal Identity*,” *Sevartham* 24(1999), pp. 37-62. Also Peter Tete, “History of the Mission of Chotanagpur: Facts and challenges Today,” *Sevartham* 21(1996), pp. 47-67; Christopher Lakra, “Ranchi Jesuit Mission: Evangelization Among the Tribals,” *Sevartham* 23(1998), pp. 83-90. Fidelis De Sa, *Crisis in Chotanagpur* (Bangalore: Redemptorist Publication, 1975).

<sup>7</sup> His life and works may be found in L. Clarysse, *Father Constant Lievens, S.J.* (Ranchi: Satya Bharti, 1984).

enslaving beliefs, namely, in the evil ‘spirits’ and witchcraft), and helped them cope with the new colonial situation. Just as Christ shared the lives of the people of Palestine, the early missionaries practised the doctrine they preached. The Adivasis moved towards Christ en masse because they freed them from the oppressive belief of the evil ‘spirits’ as well as the landlords and *thikadars*. At the same time, the people experienced the presence of Christ as “a sign of contradiction” (Lk.2:34) – *dikus*’ persecution was intensified and the colonial power allied with them, but for those who believed in him he became the liberating figure.

Christ proclaimed by the early pastors among the Adivasis was the same as he was being preached in Europe during that time – the titles of Jesus given by the early Christian community, such as, Jesus as Lord, Son of God, Son of Man, Son of David were taught to the people; and the Christological controversies of the early centuries were explained to the Adivasis using the Greek philosophical categories. In fact, the wholistic vision of life was replaced by the dichotomized vision – spiritual and secular sphere. Hence Christ was reduced to spiritual and private domain of life. Faith was equated with the knowledge about Christ and religious themes. Bodily concerns were relegated to ‘social works’. Among the pastors there was always a tension between preaching Christ and helping the people in their human needs. Nevertheless Fr. Lievens and his superior Grosjean continued to preach Christ and to help the people. The then British government, the landlords and the missionaries themselves misunderstood this approach. Ministry of Christ was understood in a dichotomized way – spiritual and secular gains. Education and health works were taken up in a major way. Due to the lack of understanding the Adivasi vision of life and presenting the European model of life as the ideal of life, the growth of the people remained divided between spiritual and material sphere. As a result, Adivasis entered into the rat race of competitive and individualistic economic progress sacrificing the indigenous sense of common good. It is true, that the education enabled the Adivasis to adjust themselves into the dominant mode of life at the cost of replacing their distinct identity in the name of a false sense of uniformity and universality. Liberation of the Adivasis was sought in acquisition of scientific knowledge and use of technology in the mode of production undermining the indigenous mode of economic production, distribution and consumption. But the present experience of life seems to prove the contrary.

## **1. The Experience of Political, Economic and Religio-Cultural Exploitation and Marginalization (Peripherization)**

Since the invasion of the Muslim rulers and consequent subjugation

of the raja of Chotanagur, the Adivasi life was greatly disturbed. Illegal land alienation by the Hindu landlords and their oppressive exploitative behaviour towards the Adivasis and introduction of Hindu religious practices and belief negatively affected their life. The Adivasis further suffered more grievously when the British colonizers brought the Adivasis under their rule and control. With the independence of the country, the Adivasis became part of a new political, economic and religio-cultural system where they are further pushed to the periphery. Politically, majoritarianism has replaced all forms of governance and it has homogenized the people. The national policies of 'integration into the mainstream' and 'national interest' have led to the peripherisation of the Adivasis. Economically, land alienation by the Governments and individuals under one pretext or other, such as, industrialization (its related aspects, i.e. roads, exploitation of natural resources in terms of mining, forest policies, hydro-electric projects, wildlife sanctuaries) and capitalist system has forced upon the Adivasis the process of globalization and liberalization, urbanization, private profit making and consumerism. The rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer. The landed Adivasis are becoming landless people. The land alienation and displacement of the Adivasis is becoming more ruthless. For example, out of the total area of Jharkhand alone 79,714.00 sq. kms 23, 417.082 sq. kms are taken over by the government as its forest area under its control by alienating it from the Adivasis; for water related projects 5,15,124.59 acres, for industrial purposes 1,75,730.18 acres; thermal power stations 6,026.87 acres; Defence establishment 1,12, 289.11 acres, national parks and sanctuaries 5,05,238.50 acres.<sup>8</sup> The government has already made a number of amendments in the land tenure act in order to alienate land from the Adivasis. Today the Adivasis are under internal colonialism. It means rich communities with the help of the government are controlling the resources of Adivasis by imposing the single money economy in the name of free market. At the religio-cultural level the Hindu fundamentalist forces which have garnered the political power of the state are imposing their religio-cultural imperialism over the Adivasis by calling them 'Hindus', and 'vanvasis'. These forces are assimilating the Adivasis into their caste structure of the society which is a subtle process of the peripherization of the Adivasis. Besides they want that the Adivasis remain where they are so that they can continue to exploit them and use them for their selfish interest. One has just to go to any town during

<sup>8</sup> Alex Ekka and Mohammed Asif, *Development-Induced Displacement and Rehabilitation in Jharkhand 1951-1995* (New Delhi: Indian Social Institute, n.d.), p. .67. Also S. Bosu Mullick and Samyadip Chatterji, *Alienation Displacement and Rehabilitation* (New Delhi: Uppal Publishing House, 1997).

feasts or the villages to see the militant presence of Hindu fundamentalist forces.

## 2. The Experience of Life Affirming and Liberation Movements

The Adivasi history of the past and the present is replete with the life-affirming and liberation movements which are geared to establish the indigenous vision of ontological structure and experience of the interdependence and interrelatedness of all life and reality. At the phenomenon of the expansion of the human presence and activity into space and time cognitively by means of technology humankind has made itself master over every other reality and breaking down the ontological interrelationship of the divine, human and cosmic sphere of life. The well being of every life depends on each one working towards the maintenance of this ontological structure and mode of relationship.

The primordial myth of the *Asurs* is the powerful myth that upholds the ontological structure of interdependence and interrelationship. The only way to uphold this structure is to overcome the greed for 'having more' and consequent desire to 'become the master' and become the 'servant' of the other. The myth presents the egalitarian relationship based on mutual service and abolishes the master-slave relationship which is hierarchical by nature. The humankind is warned of the implication of its trying to become the master over everything.<sup>9</sup>

The history of the Adivasis is one of a continual struggle for survival due to the infiltration of the non-Adivasi population represented by the caste-ridden Hindu society and their exploitation. The outsiders allied with the colonizers exploited the Adivasis to serve their own interests. The former two needed each other to serve their purposes. The most of these struggles were armed struggles which were ruthlessly suppressed by the colonizers. The Chuar Rebellion (1769-1784), Tilka Majhi (1781-1784), Chero Revolt (1771-1819), Kol Insurrection (1831-32), Santal Insurrection of 1855-1856) etc. are just a few movements which manifest the undying flame of hope amidst the situation of captivity and shake of the chains of oppression.<sup>10</sup> However, it is an irony that even when the Adivasis have their own state, they are being swallowed up by the world-wide phenomenon of globalization and internal colonization.

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- 9 For a detail study see John Mundu, *The Ho Christian Community: Towards a New Self-Understanding as Communion* (New Delhi: Media House, 2003), pp. 67-88.
- 10 Matthew Areeparampil, *Struggle for Swaraj* (Chaibasa: Tribal Research and Training Centre, 2002). The book presents a well-documented story of Adivasi struggles which sprang up among various Adivasi communities.

How should we, the Christians, speak of Christ today among the Adivasis?

### **3. Searching for New Images of Christ**

Now, I would like to take up Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?" (Mk 8:29). Sobrino has rightly indicated "there has always been an answer in the real faith of individuals and community groups, arising out of theological reflection, liturgical celebration, pastoral ministry, and on special occasions, authoritative formulation by the church in its dogmatic declarations."<sup>11</sup> This question of Jesus still echoes in Jharkhand although it has already been answered and echoing in liturgy and pastoral ministry. All the answers to Jesus' question had been historical, therefore, from the situation of oppression and peripherization of the Adivasis of Jharkhand, all the earlier answers have to be reexamined and reinterpreted in a new way so that Jesus remains the liberator of the Adivasis even though the situation of liberation seems to elude the Adivasis.

#### **a. Jesus: the Liberator**

The history of Adivasis is one of 'colonisation' of one form or other right from the beginning. Colonisation in varied forms and times meant exploitation and marginalisation. They could not settle down in one place in peace. Whatever benefits the colonialists enjoyed the Adivasis benefited a mighty little. They have to satisfy themselves with the crumbs that fall from the master's table. In this situation Jesus and his message resonated with their tradition and aspiration of well-being. Hence many Adivasis believed in Jesus. Today for the total liberation of Adivasis (spiritual as well as socio-economic and political liberation) Jesus is the answer. Jesus' message of Love is concretized in the abiding mutual service and an egalitarian social structure with its goal of ensuring the well being of everyone and every being resonates with the Adivasi way of life. The traditional fear of the evil 'spirit' is overcome by trusting in the exorcising power of Jesus. At the same time the traditional belief in all benevolent God (the Grandfather), the good 'spirits' and the ancestors (at the invisible level) and the socio-cultural-economic-political life are redefined in the light of the Gospel of Jesus. What is needed today is to correct the distortion of the traditional belief which came about from within and without including the distorted Christian way of life.

Jesus cannot be presented to the Adivasis as a great scientific – technocrat who has all the tools at his hand to bring about global liberation

which the proponents of globalization supported by the capitalist mode of thinking and life propose. It is so because this mode is very far from the Adivasi mode of equality, sharing and life of mutual enrichment.<sup>12</sup> Jesus can neither be presented as a materialistic socialist revolutionary for the economic emancipation of the poor Adivasis because it negates the religious socialism of the Adivasi tradition. However, it is close to Adivasi sensibilities. Nor Jesus can be presented in the sanskritic (Hindu) tradition of India.<sup>13</sup> This model is based on the hierarchic and oppressive structure of caste system and this is the complete opposite of Adivasi social structure and network of relationships. Hence Jesus can be presented to the Adivasis in their own tradition's liberative religious elements and socialistic network of interrelationships. It is noteworthy to point out how Jesus thwarted the tempter's suggestions of bringing about reign of God through poverty, powerlessness and humility (Lk. 4:1-13; Mt. 4:1-11).

The beginning of our presentation of Jesus must start with searching for Christ: "Where is Christ born" (Mt. 2:2).<sup>14</sup> Christ is found among the marginalized and oppressed Adivasis and as an Adivasi ever seeking to live his life according to the will of his Father (Ancestor - Grandfather-Grandmother) in order to establish the Reign of God. The Reign of God according to the Adivasi understanding consists in living by the values of anti-greed (non-addiction to cosmic things) and anti-pride (non-addiction to self-will which desires to become master over every being). Jesus being born in a poor family of Bethlehem and his manner of living and teaching resonates with the human life as projected in the *Asur* legend of Adivasis. The legend calls for the reversal of the master-slave structure of relationship and proposes the structure of mutual service even unto death.

### **b. Jesus: The Adivasi and the Ancestor**

Jesus may be presented to the Adivasis as an Adivasi (the original settler) and an Ancestor (someone who died, but alive now).

- 12 Walter Fernandes, "Challenges to Tribal Culture in the Context of Globalization" in *Responding to India's Social Challenges: Promoting Tribal Rights and Culture* edited by Agapit Tirkey (Bangalore: NBCLC, 2004), pp. 31-38.
- 13 Lancy Lobo, "Towards an Inculturation in the Non-Sankritic Tradition," *Vidyajyoti* 49(1985), pp.18-20.
- 14 Aloysius Pieris, "Contemporary Ecumenism and Asia's Search for Christ," *Teaching All Nations* 13(1976/1), pp, 28-31. The author has presented a paradigm of search for Christ in three stages as delineated in the visit of the Magi (Mt. 2:1-12). The stages are: stage of the search, the disillusionment, and the discovery of Christ seated on the knees of a peasant woman, a worker's wife' (Mt2:10-11).

Etymologically the term ‘Adivasi’ is a Sanskrit compound word: “*adi*” which means primordial or in the beginning and “*vasi*” means a dweller. Therefore “Adivasi” means the first one to dwell. The word “Adivasi” was used to designate the people [(Mundas, Hos, Uraons, Santals, Kharias and others who otherwise had their own name such as “Ho” (Hos), “Horo” (Mundas) or “Hor” (Santals)] whom the non-Adivasis found on their arrival among Adivasis as colonizers. The words of self-designation basically mean ‘a human being’.

In the light of this discussion, Jesus can be presented as an *Adivasi* who is an ancestor as well. The introductory verses of Jn. 1:1-2 of the prologue say that from the beginning the *Logos* dwell with God: he existed before anything came into being. The introductory phrases (Jn. 1:1; cf. Gen 1:1; Prov. 8:30; Wis 7:25; 9:1-4) bring a reader/listener to that incomprehensible time when nothing else but God (the creator) existed. The verse 1 says that *Logos* was with God and *Logos* was God. There is an identification of *Logos* and God. Thus “in the beginning” sets the context of the meaning that the *Logos* (Word = Jesus) is an Adivasi because his dwelling was with God before anything came into existence. Furthermore, Jesus’ saying, “before Abraham was, I am” (Jn 8:58) would mean that Jesus is an *Adivasi*. Jesus dwelt before Abraham.

The climax of the understanding of *Logos* is found in Jn. 1:14 “And the Word (*Logos*) became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; and we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” To see Jesus is to see the Father (Jn 14:8-11). Jesus claims his name as, “I am He” (Jn 8:24). He does nothing on his own accord but what the Father has taught him and he always does what pleases his Father (Jn 8:28-29). The Adivasis would easily understand such description of Jesus who became a human being like us and who showed how to fulfill the role of taking care of the creation (original wish of the creator, cf. Gen. 2:15). Every father in the Adivasi tradition leaves everything to the son(s). Even after his death as an ancestor he continues to work for the well being of the sons and their families if they remain in communion with him. Jesus, the risen one, now continues to live among those who are in communion with him in faith. He has become an ancestor.

Now, from the perspective of Adivasi world-view a question may be raised: how Jesus a Jew and a murdered one can become an Adivasi, a saviour and an ancestor for the Adivasis? From the Adivasi point of view in a normal condition Jesus would be unacceptable as an Adivasi (because he was a Jew – a *diku*) and an ancestor (because a murdered

one is not incorporated among the ancestors – such a one becomes a *jid bonga*, ‘living evil spirit’) at the existential level. In order to understand this we would have to take recourse to the myth(s) of the Adivasis and the myth of Jesus in the Scripture and the Christian tradition. Just as the mainstream Jewish people misunderstood Jesus so also the mainstream Adivasis who follow only a part of the tradition: Jesus is a scandal – a sign of contradiction which has to be opposed.<sup>15</sup> At the deepest level of Adivasi religious belief a non-Adivasi may be adopted by the people if he /she fully incarnates himself/herself in the Adivasi way of life. Secondly, the *Asur* myth symbolizes the process of how an accursed one (itch-covered boy) becomes the saviour of the people and the creation. The Christian understanding of Jesus resonates with the Adivasi belief as delineated above. Jesus has to be presented in an Adivasi way to the Adivasis while reinterpreting the Adivasi tradition in the light of the apostolic faith as found in the Gospels. At the root of the mystery of Jesus is his whole life coming to an end on the cross symbolizing the truth that all human undertakings will come to a failure. This is the human predicament, but the resurrection of Jesus manifests God’s power of re-building and of liberating the human and the cosmos from the slavery of death and power of evil entrenched in the human beings.

### Conclusion

It is noteworthy that the life of Jesus, his death, resurrection, his glorification and his elevation at the right hand of God posed a fundamental question to his contemporaries: Who is he? What is his function in the history of the people to which he belonged and for the whole human race and the creation? They used different names and titles to answer those two fundamental questions. The Palestine Christian community, Jewish Christian community of the diaspora and the Gentile Christian Jews, each chose different names and titles they had in their traditions.<sup>16</sup> In this light we may conclude by saying that the Adivasis can portray Jesus as an Adivasi and ancestor who is not only the source of grace and truth but also of the liberative action in the face of seemingly unconquerable oppressive powers and exploitative situation. Therefore, the Christian Adivasi community must proclaim Christ (the Good News) among its brothers and sisters basically as a liberator from all forms of oppression and dehumanizing situation.

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- 15 Cf. I Cor. 1:17-31. St. Paul rightly portrays how Jesus, the crucified one, becomes an obstacle for the Jews which they cannot get over, and he becomes foolishness for the Gentiles.
  - 16 Leonardo Boff, *Jesus Christ Liberator: A Critical Christology for Our Times*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), pp. 150-156.

# The Relevance of Christ's Central Message in Today's Secular India

Bandhu Ishanand Vempeny

The central message of Jesus, namely, the Kingdom of God Ideal is very similar to the World Family Ideal which is one of the constitutive elements of Indian religious and secular ethos. What strikes us most in the *Preamble* of the Indian Constitution is that it advocates equality, freedom, fraternity, democratic and socialistic values, concern for the weak, etc. These two ideals of the Kingdom of God and the World Family are very similar in content. In short, we venture to say that there is no situation or realm of Indian existence where the World Family or the Kingdom of God Ideal is not welcome. Our commitment to Jesus Christ and his values demands from us that we join hands with peoples and movements that struggle to realize the ideal of the World Family and thus bear witness to Jesus Christ.

Is the central message of Christ relevant to the secular India of today? If this message is believed to be contained in the ideal of God's Kingdom preached by Christ, who wants kings and kingdoms in a country of democracy, socialism and secularism? Our contention is that if this ideal is proclaimed in terms of Indian thought patterns, especially of the *World Family Ideal* there will be great appreciation of it and great readiness to accept it. Of course, it must be preached without the 'conversion intent'<sup>1</sup>. I shall explain the point from my experiences of proposing this message for the last two decades in different contexts. I presented this message as the World Family Ideal, which is deeply rooted in the Hindu Ethos.

Some years ago, the *Kingdom of God Ideal* was proposed in Ahmedabad to the All India Management Association in terms of management-labour-society relations. Practically all the managers were

1 Cf. Ishanand, *Conversion* (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1999), pp 1-22

non-Christians. During and after the meeting a number of participants were wondering whether such a fascinating, modern ideal could be found in the Bible. The result was even more positive when this message was presented in terms of *Christian Dharma-samsthapanā ideal* in Bhavnagar University and in the M. S. University, Baroda. When the Kingdom of God ideal was presented to Muslim scholars in India and in Malaysia as the *Christian Shariyat* there was great surprise in the audience and enthusiastic queries from them. Almost a decade ago, I gave a lecture in Gujarati in the Ahmedabad Town-hall to Hindu and Jain scholars on the topic *Christianity for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. The speech was accepted with a thunderous applause and the organizers published my paper with appreciative remarks together with my answers to the questions. More than a decade ago a paper on this ideal was read, during an inter-religious conference in Bangalore where there were quite a number of Hindu and Muslim scholars along with some Tibetan Lamas. Though there were better speakers than myself, both in style and learning, the *Deccan Herald* published some thirty percent of my paper verbatim without doing justice to the other papers.

In the first part we shall briefly describe Christ's Kingdom of God Ideal and the socio-economic (etc.) context in which it was preached. Here, only some of the characteristics of this ideal will be briefly explained in so far as they are specially relevant to us. In the second part we shall describe the Indian interpretation of this ideal in terms of the World Family Ideal. We shall point out how this ideal is present not only in various religions but also in the Constitution of India. A few passing remarks will be made as to how this ideal could be realized through Dialogal Liberation.

## Some Conceptual Clarifications

### *1. The Kingdom of God*

When Jesus entered the Palestinian scene with the proclamation: "The time is fulfilled, the Kingdom of God is at hand, repent, listen to the good news" (Mk 1:15) the Jews understood something of its meaning. The Jews prayed daily for the coming of the Kingdom: "May He establish His Kingdom during your life and during your days, and during the life of all the house of Israel."<sup>2</sup> In other Jewish religious books like *The Assumption of Moses* too, this longing for God's Kingdom is expressed.

As other ancient people like the Assyrians, Babylonians and Egyptians, the Jews too considered their God a great king (Ex.15:11-18, Ps.24:9-

10 and 74:12-17). Christian catechism teaches that ‘God’s Kingdom’ does not mean a geographical region but a situation of God’s reign, the experience of God’s power or “God in power”. In Jesus’ time a gentile emperor ruled Israel. Since the land and everything in it belong to Yahweh paying taxes to a gentile emperor was considered to be a sacrilegious act.

## **2. The Secular India**

‘Secular’ and ‘Secularism’ have different interpretations in the West and in the East<sup>3</sup>. This difference has to be taken into account before we speak of “secular India”. In the West ‘secular’ meant in its origin, non-religious if not always anti-religious, this-worldly rather than other-worldly, and natural rather than supernatural. In the evolution of this concept, we have, as it were a revenge of religion on secularism, there are *secular priests*, and *Secular Monastic Religious Institutes* in the West! These apparently contradictory terms show how this concept is a confused one even in the West.

The artificial separation of Church and State in the West is unacceptable in the Indian situation. When the Founding Fathers of our nation spoke of secularism they meant the Gandhian concept *sarvadharma-samabhav* (equal respect, interest or love for all religions). The term for religion used in most of the North Indian languages is *dharma* which etymologically (*dharayati iti dharma*) means that which holds things in unity and harmony. Sri Aurobindo writes: “Dharma in the Indian conception is not merely the good, the right, morality and justice; it is the whole government of all the relations of man with other beings, with Nature, with God, considered from the point of view of a divine principle working itself out in forms and laws of action, of the inner and the outer life, ordering of relations of every kind in the world”<sup>4</sup>. Aurobindo must have had in his mind the definition of religion given in *Hitopadesha* according to which anything that distinguishes man from animal is religion<sup>5</sup>. In the title when we speak of *secular India* we mean it primarily in this sense.

### **I. Christ’s Ideal of the Kingdom of God**

No serious theologian or Biblical Scholar, seems to doubt the centrality of the Kingdom of God Ideal in Christ’s preaching. This concept or its

3 Cfr. Ishanand, “Indian Secularism as Dialgal Religiosity”, Paul Puthanangady (ed.) *Church in India*, Bangalore:NBCLC, 1991,pp.136-150

4 Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita* (Pondicherry: Aurobindo Ashram, 1959), p.233

5 *Aharanidara bhaya maithunam casamanya etad pasubhirnaranam Dharmo*

equivalents occur in the NT more than a hundred times (according to George Soares Prabhu, 122 times, J. Fullenbach, about 150 times). The number may go higher if we add the equivalent Johannine concept "new life" to the list.

But the preaching of Jesus was concerned primarily, one might even say exclusively, with the "Kingdom of God", for everything he said and did was ultimately related to this overriding and urgent concern. The Kingdom is the referent of most of his parables (see specially Mt. 13:1-52; 18:21-35; 22:1-14; 25:1:13; Mk. 4:26-29); the subject of many of his aphoristic sayings (Mt. 7:21; 18:3; 1719:12; Mk.9:1-9:47; 10:23-25; Lk. 6:20; 9:62; 13:28-29; 16:16; 17:20-21). It is also the content of the symbolic actions which form so large a part of his ministry: his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners (Mk 2:15-17; Lk 15:12-2), and his healings and exorcisms. For, in his 'communion' with the religious and social outcasts of his people (tax collectors and sinners) Jesus demonstrates in action the presence of the Kingdom of God, that is of God's unconditional and wholly forgiving love for sinful humankind; and he explicitly interprets his miracles as 'signs' that the Kingdom of God has come and has put an end to Satan's oppressive rule (Mk. 3:23-27; Mt 11:2-6; 12:25-28)<sup>6</sup>

### 1. The Context of Christ's Preaching

It was a situation of Political oppression not only by the Romans but also by Herod, a stooge of the Romans. The economic situation was appalling. Much of the land belonged to a few Roman landlords and their henchmen who lived in luxury in cities especially in Rome giving the land on lease to the tenants demanding great remuneration from them. The Tax Collectors themselves, with the help of the Romans, extorted a lot of money from the people. So they sold their little land to the Land Lords and lived as labourers for daily wages. Many became unemployed, waiting in market places for others to hire them for daily wages (Mt 20:1 ff.), and many more sold themselves as bonded labourers as is known from history apart from the minor hints in the NT as in Lk 17:7-10. The social situation was even more desperate. People like the Publicans, Samaritans, Shepherds, Fishermen were marginalized. Most of these categories of people did not have civil rights and could not be witnesses in the civil courts.

*hi tesamadhiko viseso dharmena hinah pasubhih samanah.*

6 Unpublished notes on *The Dharma of Jesus*, pp.4-5

The most unbearable thing in the Palestinian situation was the Religious one. The Sanhedrin composed of some 71 members, was the Supreme Religio-political body of the Jews. It was presided over by the Chief Priest with membership of prominent priests, scribes, Sadducees, pharisees and big businessmen. It looked down on the poor and the marginalized. It controlled the temple administration which had enormous wealth. Legalism, externalism and ritualism were rampant.

## **2. The Main Features of the Kingdom of God Ideal**

There are many features or aspects to this ideal about which volumes have been written. The features that we are going to present are tentative and suggestive with no pretence of being exhaustive. The basis of the Kingdom of God Ideal is the '*Abba-experience*' and the '*brother-sister experience*' (*agape*) which flows from the former. We shall here enumerate a few of the characteristics of this ideal<sup>7</sup>.

### **a. Sharing**

The Eucharistic texts in the Gospels as well as in Paul contain Christ's deepest expressions of sharing not only what one has but also what one is. The Utopian communities described in the *Acts* are remarkable models in sharing and fellowship (2:42-47; 4:32-37). The parables of the Rich man and Lazarus (Lk 16) and of the Eternal Judge (Mt 25) teach this attitude emphatically.

### **b. Leadership as Service**

In any human community there is the need of leadership. But in the Kingdom community, unlike the secular communities, the leader will be serving. "The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority are called benefactors. But not so with you; let the greatest among you become as the smallest, and the leader as the one who serves." (Lk 22:26-27). While establishing the Kingdom Community in a sacramental way in the cenacle, the Master and the Lord washed the feet of His disciples like a slave, and asked them to do the same (Jn 13).

### **c. Equality**

This aspect of the Kingdom value is very similar to what we said about leadership. Jesus emphatically taught this message of equality by word (Mt 23:8-11) and by example, especially by His table-fellowship

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7 For a deeper study of the Kingdom Ideal, Cfr. Ishanand, *Games We Religious Play* (Delhi : Media House), pp.77-116.

(Cf. Mt. 9:9-13). For the Jews table-fellowship meant equality in a very special sense. Indeed, the Samaritan woman was surprised when Jesus asked her for drinking water (Jn 4). Jesus' allegory of the Vine and the Branches (Jn 15) and Paul's one of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12, *et passim*) graphically describe this equality of status. According to Paul, in Jesus Christ, who is *autobasilea* (kingdom personified), "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).

#### **d. Forgiveness**

As in any other community, in a Kingdom community too there will be crises in human relationship and there may come up blocks between persons. But the solution is not by cutting off relationships but in forgiveness. The Lord's prayer, the prayer *par excellence* of the Kingdom warns us that we can experience God's forgiving love only when we prepare the ground for it in our hearts by forgiving those who have offended us.

#### **e. Compassionate Judgement**

One of the most attractive scenes in the NT is the one of Jesus bending down writing something with his finger on the ground while the Jews are accusing a woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3 ff.). "If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Vinoba Bhave, used to say that when a person points an accusing finger at another, three fingers would be directed at himself/herself. Anyone who has experienced God's forgiving love is bound to be compassionate towards other sinners also. It is not that Christ condoned sin, but rather He loved the sinner though He hated sin. "Go away and sin no more". Jesus asks: "Why do you observe the splinter in your brother's eye and never notice the plank in your own?" (Mt 7:3).

#### **f. Option for the Anawim**

The concept *Anawim* in Hebrew means not only economically poor but also socially marginalized with no human dignity. In the Indian context this term could be used for the untouchables. After the collapse of the Soviet union and the adoption of capitalism in Chinese economy, socialism has become a byword for economic disaster. Has this slogan something to do with the Kingdom Ideal?

Apart from St. Mark's brief, pointed declaration of the arrival of the Kingdom (Mk 1:15) we have a sort of three 'inaugural' speeches of Jesus about His Project of the Kingdom at the beginning of His Public

Life: The Sermon on the Mount in Mt.5-7, Sermon on the plain as a counterpart of the former in Lk 6 and Jesus' inaugural speech in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk.4). In the Beatitudes, at the beginning of these sermons, Luke just says "How happy are you poor: yours is the Kingdom of God" (6:20) whereas Mathew adds "poor in spirit" (5:3) which is a translation of the Aramaic *inwanayya* or *anawim* which means people of diminished human worth, of diminished human dignity due to socio-economic reasons, and due to diseases like leprosy and blindness. In Luke's inaugural speech, reading Isaiah 61:1-2, Jesus affirms His stand for the economically poor and the socially oppressed and marginalized.

#### **g. Peace**

Shalom, the Hebrew word for peace, implies the possession of the spiritual and material goods, and harmonious relationship with God and the human, and humans among themselves. It has implications of 'completeness' and harmony. When Jesus sent the disciples to preach the Kingdom, the fundamental message was of peace. He instructed them to wish peace to the inmates of the houses which they would visit (Lk 10:5). In the Beatitudes (Mt 5:9) the peacemakers are called the children of God, with the implication that a genuine Abba-experience makes one a peacemaker.

#### **h. Justice**

Jesus said: "For I tell you, unless your righteousness (Gk. *Dikaiosyne*, Sanskrit, *dharma*) exceeds that of the scribes and pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 5:20). At the wake of Liberation Theology there is much talk on fighting for justice. Usually justice is understood as giving each person what is his/her due. If it is so, in terms of commutative justice, the 'boss' of Kingdom of God, either as the Father of the Prodigal Son (Lk 15) or as the Benevolent Employer (Mt.20) is patently unjust. The justice of the Kingdom of God goes far beyond this concept of justice. I prefer to call the *Kingdom Justice*, *Familial Justice* rather than *Social Justice*. I would not like to substitute it by 'love' since it can imply that the beneficiary is benevolently treated not because he/she has a right to it.

## **II . The Kingdom Ideal in The Indian Context**

### **1. The Kingdom Ideal as a World Family Ideal**

For us of the democratic age, kings and kingdoms do not have much appeal. To express however, the rootedness of this ideal in the Old

Testament (OT) tradition, this concept with royal connotation is of some value. But when we analyze its characteristics we realize that it is an ideal for the World Family. From an Indian point of view such an interpretation is of great importance as we shall soon see. The surprising thing is that this is not a forced or contrived interpretation of the NT.

The 'boss' in God's Kingdom is not a King but a Father, indeed a 'daddy'. In the prayer *par excellence* of the Kingdom, the Supreme Lord of the Kingdom is addressed as *Abba*. The Lord of the Kingdom does not punish the defectors but waits for their return like a loving father, and when the defectors return they are welcomed with fatherly embrace and with big banquets, to the great dismay of those who remained loyal to him (Lk 15). This is not the justice of a civil society.

The economic relationship of the Kingdom, if viewed from the standpoint of today's interpretation of justice, is thoroughly unjust. One man works for one hour, another for five hours and another eleven hours; but all are paid equally! (Mt 20:1-16). Such a situation occurs in a harmonious family where the unemployed grandmother, the dependent little children, the bedridden adult and so on are often given even better treatment than the earning members of the family. "From each man according to his capacity and to each man according to his need" is more a family ideal than a political one. No political society which upholds commutative justice can blame the so called 'Rich Fool' of Lk. 12 and the 'Heartless Rich Man' of Lk.16. If the money earned by the father, if the gifts received by the mother, and if the income generated by the elder brother are not shared, it will cease to be an ideal family.

The social relations upheld in the Kingdom Project too belong to the family ideals. The best expression of it is found in Christ's reaction when He was told that His mother and brothers were waiting to see Him. Stretching out his hand towards His disciples He said: "Here are my mother and my brothers. Anyone who does the will of my Father in Heaven, he is my brother and sister and my mother" (Mt. 12:50). Doing the will of His Father can be interpreted as belonging to God's Kingdom. If the members of the Kingdom are called, mothers, brothers, sisters etc., the Kingdom of God ideal is very similar to the World Family Ideal. Well Jesus Himself expressed it in these many words when He said: "You, however must not allow yourselves to be called Rabbi, since you have only one Master, and you are all brothers. You must call no-one on earth your father, since you have only one Father, and he is in heaven" (Mt.23:8-9). This World Family Ideal is present in what St. Paul says:

"This then is what I pray, kneeling before the Father, from whom every family, whether spiritual or natural takes its name" (Eph. 3:14). Elsewhere in the same epistle, Paul upholds this ideal saying: "So you are no longer aliens or foreign visitors: you are citizens like all the saints, and part of God's household" (Eph. 2:19). Because of this family ideal, in the Kingdom, the economically poor and the socially marginalized have a privileged place with special caring and sharing.

### **III. The World Family Ideal and It's Universal Attractiveness**

Now this World Family ideal can be found, as far as my limited knowledge of the world-religions is concerned, practically in all the religions including the tribal religions in spite of their tendency towards tribalism. It goes without saying that this family ideal is very liberative and life-giving as the Kingdom ideal.

Why is it so? The reason simply is that every human *longs to be loved*, desires to be *affiliated* to particular groups and wishes to be given due *recognition*. These three wants and needs are met in the normal family structures which are the primary and basic unit of society. But human beings desire to interact with ever-widening circles of fellow human beings almost limitlessly. 'Globalization' is just one aspect of this desire. As the circles of relations become wider and wider he sees that his wants and needs are met more and more superficially until these become sheer formalities and political sham. He longs and desires that these interactions may become more and more homely with deeper love, with closer affiliation and with more intense recognition of one's worth, wants and needs, at least in the nearer circles. If in ones own family such a growth-process may fail, one cannot realistically expect such a growth in the widening circles. All the same, however unrealistic this desire may be, most humans, if not all, desire, expect and long for it even in wider and wider circles of relationships. Here we can find humans' natural longings for the World Family Ideal. Indeed, the gradual realization of this ideal is part and parcel of man's self realization. If we are trained from our early childhood to make serious efforts to live this ideal, the whole world would become God's own Family (Eph.2:19).

#### **1. The World Family Ideal in the Religions of India**

As we have seen, secularism in India would mean *sarva-dharma-samabhav* which could be paraphrased as 'Dialogal Religiosity'<sup>8</sup>. From

8 Cfr.P.Puthanangadi, (ed.) *Church in India* , Ishanand, " Indian Secularism as Dialogal Religiosity," (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1991),pp.136-151

the Indian point of view, in a situation of religious pluralism, viewing other religions from their own point of view, with a sort of empathy, is a secular attitude. Hence we shall have a bird's eye-view of the chief religions of India and then of our Constitution to see how far this ideal is present in them.

#### a. Hinduism

The Hindu universalism and utopian dreams for a better and happier world are hardly ever questioned. For they are embedded in the Indian culture and are known to most educated Indians no matter what religions they may belong to. *Loka samastha sukhino bhavantu* (May all be happy!) is the morning prayer of many Hindus. This ideal is beautifully described in the *Hitopadesha*:

Ayam nijah parovetti ganana laghuchetasam

Udara charitanam tu vasudhaiva kutumbakam<sup>9</sup>

According to the above verse only small minds (*laghu-chetasam*) think of things as mine (*ayam*) and yours (*nija*), but generous or magnanimous persons (*udaracharitanam*) think in terms of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (*vasudha* = world + *iva* (= as though) + *kutumbakam* (= familylike).. This saying is similar to the following ancient saying: *Atraiva vishvam bhavati ekanidam* which expresses the wish of looking at the world (*vishvam*) as one nest (*ekanidam*). This ideal was captured by the late Indo-American astronaut, Kalpana Chawla through her photographs of the earth from the space-shuttle Columbia, and by her motto: *samucha brahmand mera kutumb hai* (= The whole cosmos is my family). Just before taking off on her final mission on the Space Shuttle, in her last interview to Anil Padmanabhan, quoting the Roman Philosopher Seneca, she said: "I was born for not one corner; the whole world is my native land", she said: "I have felt that connection and stewardship ...not just for Earth, but the whole Universe."<sup>10</sup>

What passes in English as Mr., Mrs., Master, Miss etc., in the Indian languages becomes brother, sister, uncle, aunty etc. The following common nouns from the Northern and Southern languages are given as examples: *Bhai*, (=brother in Hindi, Gujarati, etc.), *Annan*, *Thampi*, *Akka* (Elder brother, younger brother, elder sister in Tamil), *Chettan*, *Chechi*, (=elder brother, elder sister in Malayalam), *Kaka* (paternal uncle in Gujarati), *Chacha* (paternal uncle in Hindi), *Masi* (Maternal aunty in

9 K. Pranab (ed.) (Bombay: Pandurang Jivaji ), 1925

10 India Today, Feb.17,2003, p.38

Gujarāti), *Fuvaji* (paternal aunty in Hindi). The family, joint family, extended family in terms of teachers, guests, doctors, and people of the same caste, village etc. appear to belong to one family through such appellations, though the living of this ideal in practice may be quite another thing as in the case of any other ideal in any other religion.

### i. The *Pancha mahayajna*

*Pancha maha yajna* is a ritualized ideal for universal harmony in the Hindu Tradition. In this tradition *yajna* (=sacrifice) has an internalized meaning. The description given below explains the various shades and grades of meaning of this concept:

Sacrifice does not mean merely ritualistic worship performed by offering material things in the fire, but it includes all kinds of spiritual culture. Thus acts of charity, giving up of desires, control of senses and of the breath, muttering of mystic syllables and God's names, are all conceived as sacrifices (Gita 4:25-30;10:25). In fact, according to the Gita, sacrifice includes all acts whatsoever, done unselfishly".<sup>11</sup>

Insisting on the ego-less character and adding the element of purity, L. Tilak, in his *Gitarahasya* writes pointedly: "In short, one may say that doing a particular *karma* in which there is no selfish purpose, with a pure frame of mind is a *yajna* itself"<sup>12</sup> With the awareness of this inner sense of *yajna* Acharya Vinoba Bhave coined such expressions as *Bhoodan-yajna*, *sram-yajna*, *gram-dan yajna*, etc. in his Sarvodaya movement. Having this inner and broader meanings of *yajna* we can understand a very enlightening ideal ritualized through what is called *Pancha-maha-yajna* (the five great sacrifices). These sacrifices are performed as a response to one's obligation and indebtedness to the fivefold realities of the cosmos (*brahmanda*) involving its immanent and transcendental dimensions. The following passage from *Satapada Brahmana* describes these five-fold indebtedness (*rna*) and the five-fold sacrificial response to these obligations:

When he performs sacrifice it is the debt to the gods which is concerned... And when he recites the Vedas it is the debt to the sages, which is concerned. It is on their behalf, therefore, that he is taking action, for it is said of one who has recited the Vedas that he is the

11 *Cultural Heritage of India*, vol.2, "The Bhagavad Gita: Its Synthetic Character", Radhakrishnan and Co. (ed.) (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1956), p.182

12 Pune: J.S. and B.S. Tilak, 1975, p.407

guardian of the treasure store of the sages. And when he desires offspring it is the debt to the ancestors which is concerned. It is on their behalf, therefore, that he is taking action, so that their offspring may continue without interruption. And when he entertains guests, it is the debt to man which is concerned. It is on their behalf, therefore, that he is taking action if he entertains guests and gives them food and drink (1:7:2:2:2-5).<sup>13</sup>

### *ii. Concern for the Last and the Lowest*

As in the Kingdom of God Ideal, in the World Family Ideal too, concern for the last and lowest is emphatically recommended. Vinoba Bhave, the heir apparent to Gandhian spirituality, gave primacy to *antyodaya* (empowering the last and the lowest) in his *Sarvodaya Movement*. He was following the example of his Guru, Gandhiji who had advised the leaders of Independent India that to check whether a particular policy or project is on the right track, they should see whether the last and the lowest of the country gain anything out of it. If they gain, it would be a right policy or project. This ideal is found not only in the teachings of the *Sruti* and *Smriti* literatures but also in the numerous institutions of compassion and almsgiving that exist through the length and breadth of India from time immemorial. K.P. Kane writes:

Every householder was called upon by the Hindu *shastras* to offer food according to his ability to students, ascetics and to all beings including the untouchable *chandalas* and even dogs and crows. Every *Brahmana* who would teach had to do so without demanding any fee. *Maths* were established in all parts of India for expounding religious books, feeding the students and the poor. There are *annasatras* even now where hundreds are fed every day.<sup>14</sup>

In Verse 6 of a hymn of *Rig Veda* (10:117:6), *Kevalagho bhavati kevaladi* (=All guilt is he who eats with no partaker) is a typical expression of the World Family Ideal, since it is a call for shared meal implying sharing of goods. *Tiru Kural*, “the Veda of the Tamils” contains some of the finest expressions of World Family Ideal. Our limited scope allows us only a few lines as sample of the Southern attitude towards this great ideal:

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- 13 For a deeper study on *yajna & panchamaha yajna*, Cf. Ishanand, *Krishna and Christ* ( Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988), pp.206-207 and 412-414
  - 14 *History of Dharma-sastra*, vol.2, part 1, p.4, foot-note. For a long list of sacred books chiefly from the *Dharma-sastra Literature*, Cf. Kane, vol.2, part 2, pp.841

To give to the destitute is true charity. All other gifts have the nature of (what is done for) a measured return... The power of those who perform penance is the power of enduring hunger. It is inferior to the power of those who remove the hunger of others.<sup>15</sup>

Here we are concerned primarily about the universal harmony and concern for the last and lowest, the two very important aspects of World Family Ideal. The *Rama-rajya* ideal, especially of the *Tulsiramayana*, the ashram ethos of universal hospitality and harmony<sup>16</sup>, the *Satsangh* ideal and *Dharma-samsthapanam* ideal with *loksangraha* and *nishkama karma yoga* (*Gita* 4:7-8, 3:20,25)<sup>17</sup> of the *Bhagvat Gita* have been overlooked though these too imply the WORLD FAMILY ethos. True, the *karma theory* has a dominant role in Hindu ethos. But the doctrine that salvation is possible through deeds of compassion, has even a more dominant role. In fact, this aspect of Hinduism is overlooked by non-Hindu scholars<sup>18</sup>.

### **3. World Family Ideal in Other Religions of India**

#### *a. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism*

The commitment of other religions of Indian origin like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism to the World Family Ideal is too obvious to need long explanations. The Buddhist religious structure of *sangh* and the central concept of *karuna* are fundamental to the World Family Ideal.. The Jain Metaphysical concept of the many-sidedness of reality (*ananta dharmakam vastu*) and its epistemological counterparts *anekanantavada* and *syadvad* and its emphasis on *ahimsa* are open-doors to this ideal. A visit to a Sikh *gurudvara* and its *langar* (community kitchen) can make one experience the seriousness which Sikhism gives to the World Family concepts of equality and sharing. This is very similar to the Eucharistic sharing of the Christians to experience symbolically the Kingdom of God Ideal. With regard to the values of the World Family Ideal like economic sharing, equality, forgiveness, communitarian celebration, etc., the Tribal Religions of India can make significant contributions. To keep our paper within limits we shall not explain these basic structures and ideals of these religions.

15 Andrew and J. Lazarus (tr.) ( Madras: The Teachers' Publishing House ), p.47.

16 Cfr. Ishanand: "Ashram & Mission Spirituality," *Third Millennium* (April-June, 1999):122-145

17 For a detailed study of this topic Cf. Ishanand, *Krishna and Christ*. (Anand: Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, 1988), pp.328-332; pp.409-410

18 Ibid., pp.404-427

### b. Islam

In inter-religious gatherings, the Hindus and Christians often ask whether the Muslims are interested in the welfare of people outside *Umma*, outside the Islamic fold. The works of Agha Khan Trust for universal welfare is looked upon as an exception rather than the rule. Of course nobody called into question the universal love of the *Sufis*. But the truth is that the *Quranaic Justice* includes all, including one's enemies.

"Oye who believe stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is next to piety : and fear God." (*Holy Quran 5:8*).

The word translated as piety is *taqwa* which is similar to the concept of *dharma*. Asghar Ali Engineer explains this term thus: "Piety or righteousness (*taqwa*) in Islam is not merely a ritualistic concept, it is also integrally related to social and economic justice"<sup>19</sup> I have done minor studies on the Islamic concepts like *falah*, *maslaha*, *zakat* and *ribaa*, which advocate universal justice and love.<sup>20</sup> The goal of justice is *falah* which could mean well-being, prosperity, etc. The Islamic injunction of being concerned about and responsible for the welfare of 40 families around one's own families, without bothering about their racial or religious identity is a pointer towards Islamic desire for universal welfare.

## IV. The Constitution of India and The World Family Ideal

Certainly one of the most important and authoritative documents which can bind under legal sanctions all the citizens of India is the Constitution of India. The very *Preamble* of the Indian Constitution is one of the most warmly welcoming doors to the World Family Ideal:

We, the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a sovereign, socialist secular Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens:

*Justice: social, economic and political,*

*Liberty of thought expression, belief, faith and worship,*

*Equality of status and opportunity,*

*And to promote among them all*

19 *Justice, Women and Communal Harmony in Islam* (New Delhi: 1989), p.10

20 Cf. *Emerging India and the Word of God*, Amalorpavadas (ed.) "Non-Biblical Scriptures in Dialogal Theologizing" (Bangalore: NBCLC, 1991), p.431-432

*Fraternity* assuring the dignity of individual and the unity and integrity of the nation; in our constituent assembly this twenty six day of November, 1949, do hereby adopt, enact and give to ourselves this Constitution.<sup>21</sup>

It does not need much reflection to realize, that this *Preamble* is based on the World Family Ideal. The Constitutional injunction of 'reservation' for the SC, ST, OBC and certain privileges for the religious, linguistic, etc. minorities is based on this very same ideal. The concept of *fraternity* in the Preamble is specially striking.

"Might is right": this is the law of the jungle. In a civilized society, the weak are protected by the might of the powerful. What the Attorney General of India, Mr. Soli B. Sorabjee speaks of the minorities, can be applied to any of the "weaker sections" including the dalits and tribals: "Protection of the minorities is the hallmark of a civilized nation. According to Gandhiji the claim of a country to civilization depends upon the treatment it extends to the minorities. Lord Acton added another dimension: the most certain test by which we judge whether a country is really free is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities."<sup>22</sup>

## 1. The Kingdom of God Ideal or World Family Facing the Indian Challenges

One of the most obvious and frightening anti-Kingdom structures of Indian situation is casteism with the accompanying evils of untouchability and divisiveness. Another structure which has something to do with the *karma theory* is the apathy and lack of compassion towards the millions of slum-dwellers or the lakhs of pavement-dwellers in the metros and even in the smaller cities of India. Yet another challenge of the Indian situation is the rising head of religious fundamentalism which often flares up into violent riots and blood-letting. Even more terrifying is the structuralized national corruption which makes most of our development projects yield very little result. To this we may add various other challenges like the exploitation of women especially of the SC and ST and of mother earth. Can the Kingdom of God Ideal inaugurated by Jesus Christ interpreted as World Family Ideal effectively respond to these challenges?

The methodology has to be *dialogal liberation*. According to this methodology, these challenges have to be met in cooperation with other

21 Italics mine

22 Cf. S. Vempeny, *Op.Cit.*, p.186

religions in the dialogal spirit. The socio-economic issues raised by the Liberation Theologians have to be taken seriously but in dialogue with the people of other religions. This implies also re-reading of the scriptures not only the Bible by Christians but helping people of other religions to reread their scriptures with the awareness of the Liberation Theological axiom that context changes the text. There are many NGOs and movements for creating a more united and prosperous India organized by the people of other faiths. They may not have the macro-ideal of the World Family or the Kingdom of God, but we Christians could co-operate with them giving new meaning, direction and inspiration through the covert or the overt agenda of the World Family and thus bear witness to the Person and message of Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

In the first part, after making some conceptual clarifications, we situated the Kingdom of God Ideal in the Jewish context where Jesus proclaimed it. If we make a study of the socio-economic and religio-political situation of Jesus' time and compare it with the Indian situation, we can see astounding similarities especially in the matter of socio-economic oppression of the poor and the marginalized and the religio-political exploitation of the illiterate and the gullible.

In the second part, we saw how the Kingdom of God Ideal is very similar to the World Family Ideal which is one of the constitutive elements of Indian ethos. In our brief study of other religions we saw that World Family Ideal is the underlying ethos of these religions. What struck us most is the *Preamble* of the Indian Constitution, which advocates equality, freedom, fraternity, democratic and socialistic values, concern for the weak, etc. These two ideals of the Kingdom of God and the World Family are very similar in content. In short, we venture to say that there is no situation or realm of Indian existence where the World Family or the Kingdom of God Ideal is not welcome. Our commitment to Jesus Christ and his values demands from us that we join hands with peoples and movements that struggle to realize the ideals of the World Family and thus bear witness to Jesus Christ.

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# **Christophany: R. Panikkar's Insights into the Mystery of Christ**

**Jacob Parappally**

In the context of Christian initiatives to enter into dialogue with other religions, Panikkar's approach is to deepen the understanding of the Mystery of the Person of Christ who is present in all authentic traditions because he is the Lord of everything that is and that comes into being. Traditional Christology is not able to present such an understanding of Jesus Christ as it attempts at an identification of *who* Jesus is rather than what the real identity of Jesus Christ is. Therefore, Panikkar proposes a Christophany that leads to a vision of the identity of Jesus Christ in which one gets an insight into the mystery of oneself, others, the world and God.

One of the greatest contributions of Raimon Panikkar to humanity is his insight into the Mystery of Christ, which is at the same time an insight into the mystery of humans and their world. His search for a meaningful Christology which is cross-cultural and inter-religious leads him to an insight into christophany which transcends all cultures and religions and at the same time remains at the heart of all cultures and religions because it is a transforming vision into the mystery of reality.

The identity of Jesus Christ remains always a mystery in spite of the authentic witness about his person and message. Dogmas and doctrines are formulated, historical and archeological researches are carried out and biographies written to explain who he is. However all human *logoi* fail to articulate 'the length and breadth, the height and depth' of this Mystery whom we call Christ. The answer to the question, "Who do you say that I am?" (Mt 16:8) is not probably meant to refer to the questioner but to the questioned. However strange it may seem to be, the answer to the question must refer to an insight into the identity of the one who answers since the Mystery of the questioner encompasses the mystery of the one who is questioned.

## 1. The Inadequacy of Traditional Christology

Traditional Christology, with all its richness, is not intelligible outside the context in which it is articulated. It took shape when the Christian experience of Jesus Christ as the absolute meaning of one's life and as the Lord of the universe and history was articulated in dialogue with Judaism, Greco-Roman world in the beginning and later with the German mentality and finally with Islamic culture. Thus Christology was an interpretation of Christic experience conditioned by the life-situation of those who interpreted that Christic experience. Such a ready made Christology exported to other cultures, as a western product often associated with the colonial powers cannot communicate who Jesus Christ really is. This Christology cannot be catholic or universal. No Christology needs be for universal consumption. But any claim to catholicity for a limited and culturally conditioned interpretation of the Christic experience is a fragmentation of our knowledge of Christ. Further, the traditional Christology does not seem to offer a credible image of Christ to those Christians who want to be open, ecumenical, tolerant and fully committed without diluting their christianness or commitment to Christ. Panikkar says: "In fact, from the Christian perspective, the entire modern problem concerning inter-cultural and inter-religious questions hinge upon the vision of Christ. Is he an oriental pantocrator? A western divine prophet? The private God of Christians? The universal saviour? A man for others?"<sup>1</sup> But, for the Christian, Christ is the central symbol or icon that embodies the whole of reality, "the light that illuminates everyone" (Jn 1:9), the alpha and the omega and all in between.

Christology, as a systematic reflection on the mystery of Christ, is an aggressive search by human reason to make this mystery intelligible or to categorize and define the reality that transcends all definitions and categorizations. All discussions and disputes that led to the Chalcedonian Christ logical doctrine and the Christ logical reflections since then attempted to capture the mystery of Christ by making it a problem which humans can objectify, analyze and reflect upon. However legitimate and laudable these attempts had been to develop a meaningful Christology, it was done within the ecclesial tradition without any dialogue with the religious traditions as if they did not matter. Though in the initial stages of the development of Christology, the fathers of the Church entered into dialogue with religious traditions and world-views of the Greco-Roman world to get an insight into the meaning of the mystery of Christ.

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1 R. Panikkar, "A Christophany for our Times", *Theology Digest* 39 1 (1992), p.3.

With the ascendance of Christianity as the religion of the Roman empire, Christology became an inner-ecclesial affair irrelevant to those who did not share the Judeo-Christian world view. In order to liberate Christology from a narrow and limited understanding of the person of Christ and to open up the possibility for people of all cultures and religious tradition to encounter the mystery of Christ, Christology must further develop into christophany. Panikkar takes the valuable insights of traditional Christology, goes further to develop a christophany without supplanting it and provides Christology with new vistas and new possibilities to challenge one and all for a transforming vision of Christ.

One can detect in Panikkar's Christology the seeds of a christophany which further grows into a systematic articulation of christophany. In his earlier writings Panikkar grappled with the central question of Christology, i.e., identity of Jesus Christ and approached the question from cross-cultural and inter-religious perspectives.

## 2. The Identity of Christ

Christology raises the question "Who is Jesus Christ?" and reflects systematically to find an adequate and meaningful answer. The answer to the question addressed to Jesus by John the Baptist through his disciples, "Are you the one who is to come or are we to expect some other?" (Mt 11:3) is very precise referring to the identity of his person in relation to what he is performing (Mt 11:5-6). This answer may look evasive if we are searching for a conceptual 'Who'. But the 'Who' of Christ cannot be individualized by mere "here or there" as he is constantly 'the coming one'.<sup>2</sup> Here, according to Panikkar, the whole interest is centred not on the individual but on what he performs. To that extent the answer is appropriate as he is performing his messianic function. However, the question about his personal identity, his personhood is unavoidable. For the Christian proclamation it is vital to communicate who he is. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit proclaims: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:11). The name of Jesus Christ in which alone there is salvation, is not a nominalistic label, magical formula or a sign because that cannot be a saviour or mediator. This name which saves, according to Panikkar, is a real symbol. "It is a symbol, i.e., the very 'thing' as it appears and is in the world of our

2 R.Panikkar, "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation" in: Dhavamony M.(ed.), *Evangelization, Dialogue and Development, Documenta Missionalia*, Rome, 1972, p.195.

experience.”<sup>3</sup> A pure thing does not exist and nothing can exist without a name. Since any name with a meaning has an ontologic constitution, it is neither purely subjective nor objective. The name is a real symbol because it is thrown between the subject and the object. If there is salvation in “no other name”, only through the reality intended by this name there is salvation. It also implies that this reality can be encountered by people having other world-views, cultures and religious traditions which have other meaningful names for this reality. For Christians it is constituted by no other name than that of Jesus Christ.

A mere lip-service to the name Jesus Christ is not sufficient to lead one to the kingdom of heaven. The reality intended by this name must be encountered and proclaimed. Who is Jesus Christ? Panikkar says that Peter’s answer “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Mt 16:16), is perfect in the context in which the question is raised.<sup>4</sup> How can one translate this confessional statement in the way a Christian understands into the Indian context, for example, where there is no expectation of a Messiah but there is a strong belief that all are the sons of the living God? How can the answer of Peter, who Jesus is, be meaningful outside the Petrine world? Panikkar asks whether those who do not share the Semitic world-view need to be circumcised in their minds to make this confessional statement intelligible to them. If the proclamation of Christ is to be intelligible to the one who is outside the Semitic tradition, it has to be really translated and not transliterated. So the answer to the question ‘Who is Jesus of Nazareth?, the Messiah, the Son of the living God’ is to be answered not through the principle of individuation, i.e., what individualizes and distinguishes him from others but through a principle of identity.

Panikkar distinguishes a double principle of individuation, namely, the principle of singularity which relies on external factors to distinguish a thing and admits plurality; and the principle of individuality which is grounded on the internal constitution of being which is capable of self-identity. In the context of Christian faith, we cannot apply both these principles to Jesus. In his person, he is not one among many, and so the principle of singularity cannot be applied to him. The principle of individuality would refer to what makes Jesus, Jesus or the ‘what’ of

3 Ibid., p.197.

4 R. Panikkar, “The Relation of Christians to their Non-Christian Surroundings”, in: *Christian Revelation and World Religions*, J. Neuner (ed.) (London, 1967), p.163.

Jesus or the thing-in-itself. This will not answer the question of who Jesus is or of his identity as a living person. Panikkar is not saying that one cannot distinguish Jesus as a historical figure from James or John. But in the traditional Christology, Christ is not a single individual in the sense of other historical personages, simply a member of the species. "Christ has a human nature indeed, he is Man but he is not a human person. He is a divine person, the second person of the Trinity having assumed human nature."<sup>5</sup> In this sense, following the Christology of Chalcedon, Panikkar says that Christ is man but not one man, a single individual, he is the divine person, incarnated and is in hypostatic union with human nature.<sup>6</sup> But the presence of Christ for the believer here and now is the divine presence. Panikkar admits that if we push this doctrine too far we may end up in docetism or disincarnationism. The principle of singularity cannot be applied to Jesus because he is not simply a numerical exemplar of a species of human mortals. But then how do we defend his true humanity? Panikkar says that if we insists on defending the humanness of Jesus, we end up insisting that the man Jesus has something peculiar, which, while not diminishing his humanness transcends it in such a way as to make possible a *sui generis* relationship with him. This uniqueness of Jesus is the very negation of singularity and individuality. Panikkar affirms that the living Christ of Christian faith who is present in the sacrament and in others, who transcends time, with whom one can enter into a personal relationship, does not fall in the category of individual in the philosophical and current sense of the word.

The important issue in any christological reflection should not be the philosophical and theological problems concerning the unity of natures, divine and human, in Jesus Christ. According to Panikkar the important issue is encountering him as true God and true man. The encounter is possible only when identity can only be said to be real and thus true if we enter into a personal relationship with him. Only then may one discover the living Christ of faith who lives in the interior of oneself'.<sup>7</sup> In this experience one realizes that Jesus is one who does not fall into

5 R.Panikkar, "Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation", p. 205. Panikkar refers to P. Schoonenberg who discusses the problem of the unity in Christ as a person who is divine and human at the same time. P. Schoonenberg, *Ein Gott der Menschen* (Zuerich, Einsiedln, Koeln: 1969), p.92.

6 R. Panikkar, *Ibid.*, p. 205.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 212.

the category of singularity or individuality and his character is "not singleness but communion, not incommunicability, but relations".<sup>8</sup> So in Peter's confession of faith, that thou art Messiah, the Son of the living God, the only universal element, according to Panikkar, is *thou*. This *thou* is not the projection of one's own ego, and the issue is not to elucidate the predicate of this sentence but to discover existentially the subject. This *thou* cannot be and should not be pinpointed by an unequivocal means of identification as it would lead to idolatry which is a sin against the Spirit. Therefore, according to Panikkar: "The word Jesus has two basically different meanings: one as historical category and another as personal category. The former is reached by means of historical identification, which permits us to speak about Jesus and about the beliefs Christians have in and through him. The latter is reached by means of personal identity and allows us to discover him a 'part' or rather pole of our personal being, as one of the many traits that make our person."<sup>9</sup>

In his cryptic and often misunderstood statement, "Christ is the Lord but the Lord is not only Jesus",<sup>10</sup> Panikkar is trying to overcome the limitations of the understanding of Christ in the historical category. If we insist on understanding Jesus exclusively in historical categories, we will only discover him as a great man of history but we will not be moved to any personal relationship with him. "Jesus will appear as a historically relevant figure of the past, with a still uncommon influence on the present, but the only point of reference will be his historical coordinates and his impact on the lives of other men."<sup>11</sup> If Christology has to be true to its name then it should not be satisfied with a Jesuology which according to Panikkar is the tendency of the contemporary European approaches to Christology.<sup>12</sup> For the Christian who encounters the risen Christ in faith cannot but identify him the historical Jesus. That is the guarantee that the Person who enters into the very structure of his

8 R. Panikkar, *Salvation in Christ: Concreteness and Universality, the Supersubname* (Santa Barbara: 1972), p. 32.

9 R. Panikkar, "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation," p. 212.

10 R. Panikkar, "Have Religions the Monopoly of Religion?" in: *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* (Editorial), 15 (1974), p. 409.

11 R. Panikkar, "The Meaning of Christ's Name in the Universal Economy of Salvation," p. 212.

12 See R. Panikkar, *Die vielen Goetter und der eine Herr: Beitraege zum oekumenischen Gespraech der Weltreligionen* (Weilheim: 1963), p. 69-70

being had a human existence at a particular time of history. But then he knows too that it was a limited existence even though it was of utmost importance that God became human in history. The Christ of the believer's existential and personal experience transcends the historical constraints and limitations. Panikkar uses the example of Eucharistic presence of Christ which is the real living Christ one encounters in communion. Here the real presence of Christ is not identified with the historical existence of Jesus. Separated from the faith dimension, outside this personal encounter with the risen Lord, Jesus would be as any other religious founders. Then he would be considered "a remarkable Jewish teacher, who had the fortune or misfortune of being put to death rather young".<sup>13</sup> Panikkar asserts that the living Christ of every Christian generation is invariably more than the above description of Jesus.

According to Panikkar, Christ is to be seen not only in the limited Abrahamistic or Semitic tradition but also in the cosmic tradition of mankind and in all authentic religious traditions. The whole Christ is historical and trans-historical, pre-existent, historically existed at a particular place, time and culture. He is the living one who can be encountered in the sacraments, in all human beings and especially in the deprived and the depraved. He is the most perfect expression of the complete harmony between everything that is Divine, Human and Cosmic or the Cosmotheandric reality. This person who makes the human, the divine and the cosmic communion possible cannot be thought of only in spatio-temporal categories. It is true that it is in Jesus of Nazareth that a Christian encounters Christ. But the Christ of the Christian believer transcends the historical limitations of Jesus of Nazareth. But this insight of Panikkar should not be construed as his attempt to separate Jesus of Nazareth from Christhood as some of his critics accuse him of separating the two. But the Christ of Panikkar's Christology is not an a-personal principle. "The Christ that sits at the right hand of the Father is the first-born of the universe, born of Mary; he is the Bread as well as the hungry, naked or imprisoned."<sup>14</sup> This Christ is the second Person of the Trinity, the pre-existent Christ who reveals himself in Jesus of Nazareth. Panikkar's attempt is to overcome the tendency of Jesuology which makes Jesus an idol without transcending him which Jesus himself did at his resurrection.

13. R. Panikkar, . *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Bangalore: ATC Publ., 1982), p. 27.

14 *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28.

In the context of dialogue with other religions, Panikkar's approach is to deepen the understanding of the Mystery of the Person of Christ who is present in all authentic traditions because he is the Lord of everything that is and that comes into being. Traditional Christology is not able to present such an understanding of Jesus Christ as it attempts at an identification of *who* Jesus is rather than the identity of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Panikkar proposes a Christophany that leads to a vision of the identity of Jesus Christ in which one gets an insight into the mystery of oneself, others, the world and God.

### **3. Christophany: A Disclosure of Christ**

In his attempt to offer a credible figure of Christ to those Christians who wish to enter into dialogue with people of other religious traditions without diluting their christianness or fidelity to Christ, Panikkar proposes a christophany that transcends traditional Christology without supplanting it. In his Bellarmine lecture of 1991, delivered at St. Louis University, Panikkar outlined a sketch of this christophany, which I think, recapitulates his christological reflections of about half a century.

For Panikkar, the christophany that he proposes stands for the disclosure of Christ to human consciousness and critical reflection. Unlike Christology from which christophany does not totally depart, it emphasizes a more passive attitude of receiving the impact of Christ as against a more aggressive search by human reason for intelligibility. It reintegrates the Christ figure into a cosmological vision as well as integrates with critical discernment the homeomorphic equivalents of the same in other traditions where there is an epiphany of the sacred or the divine. Though christophany does not claim to be universal it claims to offer a credible figure of Christ which enables Christians to enter into dialogue with other religious tradition and to remain open, ecumenical and tolerant. Christophany develops in continuity with the traditional Christology and it is a description of that epiphany of the real which Christians call Christ. Further, "Christophany is the fruit of dialogue with other religions as much as an interpretation of its own tradition over against a modern background".<sup>15</sup> Such a dialogue helps us to enter more deeply into the mystery of Christ. Christophany offers a way to Christians together with the people of other religions to understand the figure of Christ.

Panikkar describes his christophany in nine theses or *sutras*. The first of these *sutras* is the fundamental one, i.e., Christ is the symbol of

15 R. Panikkar, "A Christophany for Our Times", p. 5.

all reality. Panikkar uses the term symbol to express the experience of reality in which subject and object, interpreter and interpreted, phenomenon and its nuemenon inextricably unite.<sup>16</sup> Christ is the symbol of reality because in him are enclosed not only "all treasures of divinity" but also "all Mysteries of Man" and all the density of the universe. Both the biblical and christological affirmations about the person of Christ undoubtedly leads to this conclusion. He is the mediator and not an intermediary, fully human and fully divine, the light that illuminates every one and everything is made by him and in him, the alpha and the omega and all in between. Therefore every being is a christophany and Christ is the symbol of the divinization of the universe.

A Christian knows Christ in and through Jesus. This is the second *sutra* of christophany. The Christian discovers Christ *in* and *through* Christian revelation and experience. It is not a mere confession that Jesus is the Christ that saves one but the existential encounter with the reality that the name of Jesus Christ discloses. It is through the personal experience in communion with the community of believers i.e., the Church; Jesus is recognized, acknowledged and believed to be Jesus Christ, through whom the universe was made, the Son of God, Light from Light, True God from God.

Panikkar repeats in his third *sutra* what he has already stressed in his earlier christological reflections, namely, Christ's identity is not his identification. Jesus can be objectively identified as born and died at a particular place and time. But this will not reveal his identity which is not an objectifiable category. Christ's identity can only be encountered through a loving relationship, which is a gift from above. Christophany seeks to maintain the equilibrium between the identification and identity of Jesus or between the 'Jesus of history' and 'the Christ of faith'.

Since the identity of Jesus Christ transcends the spatial and temporal limitations and belongs to the mystery of person and personal relationship, Panikkar's fourth *sutra* of christophany says that Christians do not have a monopoly of the knowledge of Christ. The Christian experience of Jesus Christ and the reflection on him do not exhaust the mystery of Christ. There are many aspects of this mystery which surpass all understanding and can be recognized in the insights of other religious traditions.

It is imperative for Christians to study other religions for an adequate self-understanding of the Christian faith and to liberate Christology from

its limitations. Therefore, the fifth *sutra* says that christophany is the overcoming of a tribal Christology. It means that the contemporary Christology must incorporate, as far as possible, the insights about the mystery which Christians call Christ and which manifests itself in other religions. Traditional Christology remained a tribal Christology because it did not take into consideration in its understanding of Christ all other religious experiences of humanity, concentrating almost exclusively on its own concerns. This Christology cannot address the ecological crisis and the human crisis of absolute poverty, injustice, oppression, wars and religious fundamentalism and communalism. However, christophany by its very approach to the mystery of Christ and its openness to the manifestation of the Christic mystery in other religious traditions can promote dialogue and collaborative action to face the ecological and human crises of our times.

Christophany considers that 'protological, historical and the eschatological Christ is one and the same reality distended in time, extended in space and intentional in us'. This is the sixth *sutra* which expresses the unity of Christ as creator; redeemer and glorifier. He is also one of the Trinity and the full manifestation of the Trinity. Christophany reveals to us the threefold tension in our awareness of reality. In the experience of temporal realities we get a glimpse of something not distended or timeless, eternal. In the experience of reality as spatial and material we get a glimpse of something more than matter, i.e., Spirit. Further, everything in us tends towards something beyond us, a transcendence, to God. Christophany shows that if Christ is not a dead symbol, creation, redemption and glorification relate to him. Creation is *creatio continua* which is the foundation on which concrete time, temporality of every instant rests. The protological Christ or the pre-existent Christ is the same as the historical Christ and the historical Christ cannot be separated from the eucharistic Christ or the risen Christ. In the same way, the Christ of the parousia cannot be separated from the eucharistic and risen Christ. Thus christophany helps us to integrate past, present and future and thus live consciously a tempiternal life.

For Panikkar, incarnation is also inculturation. It is the seventh *sutra* of his christophany. According to Panikkar, incarnation is not only a historical event but also a cultural event intelligible in a particular cultural context. In the Semitic culture it was intelligible because of its understanding of history. Outside the Semitic culture its intelligibility depends on its trans-historical value. In Hindu India the experience of the Christian Christ is better reenacted by the sacrifice of the Eucharist

than by the narrative of Bethlehem. Incarnation is an historical act happened in history but it is a temporally irretrievable event as it affects Man who cannot be reduced to a mere historical being. Though Christianity is an historical religion, Christ in whom it believes in is more than an historical reality, in the sense the Semitic culture understood history. Since incarnation is already an inculturation in a particular culture its acceptance in another culture transforms that particular culture which accepted this reality of incarnation. Therefore, we cannot absolutize one particular christophany.

Christophany reveals to us the reality of a Church which has no boundaries. According to the eighth *sutra* of Panikkar's christophany, the church understands itself as the locus where Incarnation takes place. The nature of the Church, as the mystical Body of Christ, as *sacramentum mundi* or in Greek *mysteriou tou kosmou* refer to a cosmic Church. The ecclesiology of the Fathers must prevent us from a microdoxical interpretation of the church reducing it to an official church and to mere historical phenomena. It is the Church that exists throughout the universe, the locus of salvation. Man and the entire creation can reach salvation because at the very root of creation is the mediator, the link, the Christ, begotten by the source and origin of all divinity, who not only creates but also divinizes through his Spirit. The place where this takes place is the Church. It is also the field where the universe seeks its final destiny. Panikkar says that Man is the priest or the mediator in this divine cosmic struggle. Christophany is the epiphany of this, our own role in the universe.

In the final *sutra* Panikkar affirms that Christophany is the manifestation of the mysterious union of the divine, human and cosmic "dimension" of reality. As Jesus Christ is pure transparency, whoever encounters him encounters the Father as well as the full Man and the cosmos. He is the living symbol of divinity, humanity and cosmos. This experience according to Panikkar, is the cosmotheandric intuition. Further, Panikkar says: "In Jesus Christ the finite and infinite meet. In him the human and the divine are united. In him the material and the spiritual are one - to say nothing of masculine and feminine, high and low, heaven and earth and, obviously, the historical and transhistorical, time and eternity."<sup>17</sup> Christophany shows that Christ cannot be separated from the Trinity, humanity and history. If Christ is separated from the Trinity he is just like any great teacher or prophet, if he is separated from

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17 R. Panikkar, "A Christophany for Our Times", p.20.

humanity he becomes another God, if his humanity is separated from his historical context he becomes a gnostic figure who does not share our limited human conditions.

### Conclusion

Panikkar's christophany is inseparable from his Christology. His Christology grows into christophany which offers a new, synthetic and transforming vision of reality and its symbol, the figure of Christ. If Christology is the root, christophany is the fruit. Christophany offers a challenging vision that liberates Christians from a narrow and sectarian understanding of Christ to a richer understanding and a better appreciation of the gift of the person of Christ in dialogue with other religious traditions and cultures and to work in harmony with them to face the ecological and human crises of the contemporary world.

Panikkar's christophany, though systematic in its articulation, transcends systems and particular ideologies and at the same time it does not claim any universality. Since it is a vision and insight, each one is invited to enter into it and experience the fullness of life. It offers a figure of Christ who manifests who God is, what the world is, and what we are and what we can become. It may take time for Christians as well as the followers of other religious traditions and cultures to understand, appreciate and accept the richness, depth and value of the intuition of Panikkar, but when it happens it will certainly affect and transform those who are open to respond to their innate nature of transcendence and communion.

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